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Soft-Spoken Man Who Gets Things Done

John M. Goshko profiles the next U.N. chief, who faces the difficult task of reforming the organization

KOFI ANNAN of Ghana, chosen last week to be the next U.N. secretary general, has spent his adult life as an international civil servant, shuttling around the world in sensitive but largely anonymous tasks for the United Nations.

The U.S.-educated Annan, 58, is well-liked by colleagues with whom he has labored for three decades in the U.N. system in such little-noticed areas as budget analysis and personnel management. His style represents a big change from that of the current secretary general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, an imperious, high-profile Egyptian diplomat who could go months without talking to his key subordinates and who frequently treated the ambassadors of major powers condescendingly.

It is too early to tell how a longtime U.N. bureaucrat like Annan will meet the challenges of guiding the world body into the 21st century.

He must help to map the priorities that the United Nations will follow in the post-Cold War period, find ways of getting the organization through the worst financial crisis in its 51-year history and satisfy U.S. demands for far-reaching reforms.

It would be a tall order for someone with a far more distinctive record of success in diplomacy or politics. Now, given Annan's relative anonymity, there are questions about whether, as a creature of the system, he will have the boldness and imagination to lead a restructuring that the United States and its supporters hope will involve cutting large numbers of employees and eliminating many traditional U.N. practices and activities.

Yet, while even many experts in international affairs would have trouble recognizing his name, the soft-spoken Annan commands considerable respect among those who who have seen him in action.

That has been especially true during the last three years when Annan held what has been at once the most vital and controversial job within the United Nations — head of peacekeeping activities in such trouble spots as Somalia and Bosnia.

Annan became undersecretary general for peacekeeping in 1993 at a time when the Bosnia operations had caused many conservative Republicans in Congress to become bitterly critical of Boutros-Ghali and his representative in Bosnia, Asushi Akashi, for their alleged appeasement of Serb aggression against the Bosnian Muslims. So intense was their anger that it led the Clinton administration to conclude that relations between Congress and the United Nations could be repaired only if the United States vetoed Boutros-Ghali's re-election.

Nevertheless, by early this year, several Republican foreign policy strategists on Capitol Hill — among them aides to GOP presidential candidate Robert J. Dole — were enthusiastically saying that Annan, who personally went to Bosnia to take over from Akashi, would make a superb secretary general. Prompting their admiration was what they regarded as his even-handedness and skillful performance in guiding U.N. peacekeeping forces through the handoff last year to a NATO-led force.

At the United Nations, where the U.S. veto of Boutros-Ghali caused great resentment among the other members, the endorsement of American conservatives should have been the kiss of death for anyone aspiring to the secretary general's office. But, when Annan was among four Africans who declared their candidacy last week, the universal perception of him as the "American candidate" did not stop him from sprinting into a lead.

"He brings a certain style to things," said a senior U.S. diplomat, who declined to be identified, in discussing why Annan is able to appeal with such ease and popularity to American conservatives and Third World radicals. "He is respectful, he listens carefully, he is collegial, and he never loses sight of what is practical."

Muhamed Sacirbey, Bosnia's ambassador to the United Nations and a frequent harsh critic of U.N. peacekeepers in his country, pointedly singles out Annan for restoring what the Muslims regarded as fairness to U.N. operations there. Sacirbey said: "People trust him because he is honest."

Others cite Annan's sense of humor. During the maneuvering that preceded his election, France raised questions about whether he speaks French. Annan's colleagues say that when asked him about it, Annan replied in lilting West African tones, "I now speak English with a French accent."

Born into a family of traditional tribal chiefs, he began his education in Ghana and, with the aid of a Ford Foundation grant, left home in 1959 to study at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he earned a bachelor's degree in economics. He later studied at the Institut Universitaire de Haute Etudes Internationales in Geneva and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which awarded him a master's degree in management.

Annan entered the U.N. system in 1959 by joining the World Health Organization. In the 1970s, he returned home for two years to head Ghana's tourism development board. But the rest of his adult life has been spent with the United Nations and its affiliated agencies, either in New York or in its outposts in Addis Ababa, Cairo and Geneva.

Annan's wife, Nane Lagergren, is the daughter of a noted international jurist and the niece of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who rescued thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis before disappearing into what is believed to have been Soviet imprisonment and death at the end of World War II.

Mandela Broadens Amnesty Offer for Political Crimes

Lynne Duke in Johannesburg

SOUTH AFRICA'S truth-telling process received a shot in the arm last week when President Nelson Mandela broadened his government's offers of amnesty to those who confess to political crimes. The much-sought move was followed by an apartheid-era army chief's announcement that he would seek amnesty and tell all to the nation's truth commission.

Mandela extended the deadline by which people can apply to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for amnesty in return for a full confession of their deeds: they will now have until March 10, rather than until December 14. He also called for extending the eligibility period for crimes to qualify for amnesty — from the current December 1993 cutoff to May 10, 1994, the day Mandela was sworn in as South Africa's first black president.

Retired Gen. Constand Viljoen, head of the South African Defense Force from 1980 to 1985, announced that he now will seek amnesty. He was one of the leaders of a white right-wing uprising in the spring of 1994 that began with a deadly bombing campaign and ended in a failed attempt to take over the black "homeland" of Bophuthatswana and derail the nation's first all-races election. After some of Viljoen's men were summarily executed before international television cameras, he helped Mandela negotiate an end to the so-called "Battle of Bop."

Viljoen, leader of the Freedom Front party, has emerged as one of the white political leaders who has Mandela's ear. Mandela said that he extended the application deadline and, prospectively, the period covered, in recognition of the constructive role that Viljoen had played.

Mandela was also under pressure from the truth commission's leader, retired Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu, to extend the amnesty deadlines.

Others involved in right-wing attacks, including the 1994 bombing campaign, are likely to also seek amnesty in what truth commission members expect to be a surge of amnesty pleas from across the political spectrum.

Parliament must amend legislation governing the truth commission's operations to extend the amnesty-qualifying period.

The commission was established after the 1994 election to offer reparations to victims of apartheid-era human rights violations as well as amnesty to perpetrators who confess. The process is aimed at helping South Africa come to grips with its racist and violent past of white-minority rule.

Even before the application deadline had been extended, an avalanche of amnesty requests had flooded into truth commission offices. And last week about 60 applications for amnesty were sent to the truth commission from the ruling African National Congress. Among the applicants were three sitting cabinet ministers: Defense Minister Joe Modise, who was chief of the ANC's military wing; safety and Security Minister Sydney Mufamadi; and Posts and Telecommunications Minister Jay Naidoo.



Mandela signs the new South African constitution into law in Sharpeville last week watched by Cyril Ramaphosa, chairman of the constitutional assembly PHOTOGRAPH: ADIL BRADLOW

Court Rules Bare Breasts Are Legal

Howard Schneider in Toronto

AS SHE strolled bare-breasted down the streets of Guelph one day in 1991, Gwen Jacobs slowed traffic, caused mothers to snatch away their children and prompted at least one group of men to reach for their binoculars.

But she didn't, Ontario's highest court has decided, do anything obscene, indecent or otherwise prosecutable.

A three-judge panel of the Ontario Court of Appeals ruled last week that the female chest, publicly displayed, is no more offensive to community standards of decency than a bare-chested man at the bench or a construction worker cooling off without his shirt.

In so concluding, they overturned Jacobs's conviction of three years ago on indecency charges in a case that prompted half-naked protests throughout Canada on her behalf.

She had been fined $75 after deciding, on a humid summer day in 1991, to doff her shirt and stroll through Guelph, a rural town 50 miles southwest of Toronto. Along the way, she refused requests by police and neighbors that she cover up. She said she was only doing what men did, and didn't like being treated differently because of society's narrowly sexual interpretation of her breasts.

The appellate court agreed, in a ruling that opens the way for women to forgo upper-bodywear throughout Canada's largest province. A similar ruling in the New York courts four years ago, stemming from a "Top-Free Picnic" in Rochester, has allowed women the right to go topless in that state, but there apparently has been no rush to exercise it.

The Ontario decision can be appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada within 60 days, but Jacobs's lawyer said she would expect the same outcome there. The Ontario judges had no qualm with existing laws or definitions of decency established in prior cases, she said, but believe that women's breasts "in and of themselves" don't offend local standards.

The lawyer, Margaret Buist, said the case hinged on the distinction between "walking along the street swinging your breasts, saying come and get it . . . and doing exactly the same as a man would do on a hot summer day." Blatantly sexual exposure, or the commercial use of bare-breasted bodies for advertising, for example, would still be against the law, she said.

The judges "looked at the evidence, looked at the fact that traffic slowed down, children were taken away by their mothers," Buist said. "There is no real harm here to the public . . . The whole issue is the context. We argued that a woman's breasts are not inherently sexual, in and of themselves."

In a statement released through her lawyer, Jacobs said that is precisely the point she hoped to make.

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It's still the economy, stupid

THE YEAR IN THE USA
Martin Walker

THE YEAR was dominated by the presidential election campaign, and Bill Clinton's astute management of the economy, of the Republican Congress and of the legislative agenda, which all served to ensure his easy re-election. This looks to have been far more certain in retrospect that it appeared as the year began, or even as late as August, when the veteran Republican Senate leader Robert Dole seemed at the time of his party convention in San Diego to be mounting a strong challenge.

The elections of 1996 were always going to be dominated by four main themes. The first was the degree to which the incumbent Bill Clinton could shake off the nagging scandals that mushroomed from the original Whitewater investment in Arkansas, and claim his reward for the best economic performance of any of the advanced industrial countries.

The second was the ability of the Republicans to capitalise on their stunning success in the 1994 mid-term elections, when they recaptured both Houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years. This was to hinge not only on the quality of the presidential candidate that they elected, but also on his ability to bridge the disturbing gap between the religious right, the party's moralistic wing, and its more materialist wing, whose main concern was economic growth and tax cuts.

The third theme of importance was the fate of the third party in American politics: whether the Texan billionaire Ross Perot would run again; and how far he could repeat the success of his 1992 performance, when he won more than 19 million votes, securing the support of one voter in five. In the event, he won one vote in 12, sufficient to deny Clinton the mandate he craved, and to allow his critics to claim that more Americans voted against him than for his re-election.

The final theme of the 1996 elections was, in the long run, perhaps the most significant. It was the double implosion of the fundamental consensus on which domestic and foreign policy had been run since Franklin Roosevelt's day, and the degree to which a replacement consensus was beginning to emerge.

President Roosevelt was the last leader to confront a collapse of the broad and agreed principles around which the political debates on foreign and domestic policies were staged. The old verities of economic policy fell apart with the Great Depression, in far more critical and perilous circumstances. Roosevelt's New Deal, later buttressed by Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, was to establish what became the political economy of modern times: mixed public and private enterprise, in which the preeminent federal government taxed around 20 per cent of gross domestic product to provide social security and welfare and generous public investment in education and the national infrastructure.

Under threat throughout the Reagan years, but sustained by the Democratic majorities in Congress, this New Deal system was fatally undermined by the manifesto of the Clinton campaign in 1992. Campaigning as a "New Democrat" who was determined to break out of the party's shrinking electoral base in the cities and make the Democrats electable in the middle-class suburbs, Clinton foreshadowed a departure from this Roosevelt-Johnson tradition. He promised "an end to welfare as we know it", a middle-class tax cut, 100,000 extra police on the streets and a shrunken and more entrepreneurial federal government.

The Republican Congress elected in 1994 sought to take this much further. They promised a constitutional amendment to require that the federal budget be balanced, term limits to restrict congressmen to eight years in office and senators to 12, and prepared to control the fast-rising costs of the health subsidies for the elderly (Medicare) and the poor (Medicaid). Clinton managed to slow and finally to block the Republican charge, but in his 1996 State of the Union address conceded the essential principle when he declared, "The era of Big Government is over".

The foreign policy consensus that had sustained US diplomacy around the leadership of global military coalition since 1941 was also in disrepair after the end of the cold war. Clinton, building on the free trade negotiations with Canada and Mexico negotiated in the Reagan and Bush years, offered a replacement.

> **The striking feature of the 1996 election was how little argument emerged between the parties**

The real core of Clinton's foreign policy was economic, rooted in his conviction that the cold war world of geo-politics and arms control summits was giving way to a new era of geo-economics and trade pacts. Clinton's Pacific Rim summit in Seattle in 1993 pointed the way. His determination to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Gatt world trade agreement, although he had to split his own party in Congress to do so, began to suggest a Clinton Doctrine; that the world should become a global market of free trading democracies, with the giant (and fast-recovering) US economy as both linchpin and guarantor.

The striking feature of the 1996 election campaign, which suggested that the new foreign and domestic policies were well on their way to being broadly accepted, was how little argument eventually emerged between the parties on these grand themes.

The Republican candidate, Robert Dole, nibbled at the edges of Clinton's commercial policy, insisting that he would not "subordinate American sovereignty to the faceless bureaucrats of the World Trade Organisation", which had been established in Geneva as an international adjudicator on trade disputes under the Gatt treaty.

Dole hammered at the early fecklessness and amateurism of Clinton's more conventional foreign policy, in the Somalian disaster and the early embarrassments in Haiti, and over the see-saw policies of appeasement and trade brinkmanship with China. But Clinton's broad strategy, that the cold war leader of the free world should become the leader of the free-trade world, was not really in dispute. The only argument over the enlargement of Nato was how fast to proceed.

Even more surprisingly, the far more embryonic consensus on domestic policy did not become a campaign issue. Indeed, the shift from New Deal to a leaner (and it must be confessed meaner) government was roundly endorsed by both parties in mid-campaign. In the week after the Republican convention in San Diego, Clinton signed into law three bills, each passed with Republican support, which defined and consolidated the new domestic consensus.

The first was to raise the minimum wage from $4.25 to $5.15 an hour, a long-standing Democratic objective: few had predicted Clinton's success in persuading the Republicans to agree. The second was the Kennedy-Kassebaum health insurance bill, which was a not unreasonable second-best to Clinton's initially grander hopes of a national health insurance system. It ensured that any worker who changed or lost his job would retain his existing health insurance.

The third was the welfare reform bill, which ended the 60-year-old principle established under Roosevelt's New Deal that in the last resort the federal government would provide for impoverished mothers and children. Welfare henceforth would be limited to two years at a time, and to a maximum of five in any individual life, and it would require a readiness to work. Its administration was entrusted to the individual states, a significant surrender of federal power.

The guiding idea behind the new domestic consensus was to make a sharp, and almost Victorian distinction, between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The deserving poor were those who worked, or were prepared to — the glorification of work had always lain at the core of the Clinton project. His two signal legislative achievements in 1993 were the Family Leave Act, requiring workers to have time off to care for a sick dependant, and the Earned Income Tax Credit, which in effect abolished income taxes for families on less than average wages, a reform which he claimed benefited some 27 million working Americans.

There were, naturally, few Republican objections to these aspects of the Clinton presidency. The Dole campaign therefore was based on three fundamental issues. The first was a 15 per cent tax cut. The second was the need to restore traditional values, which he thought included an end to affirmative action for ethnic minorities, and the withdrawal of US citizenship for children of illegal immigrants, even

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Race that's littered with obstacles

THE essay by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (Black looks and white lies, December 22) was not entirely right. The people of California did not "[vote] to ban gender and race quotas in government posts" — nor could they have done so as there have never been any. The far right in the United States would have you believe that virtually every black man or woman in employment owes their place to a quota, but that doesn't mean it is true.

Quotas do exist in the US but their use is very limited. None the less, the fact of their existence has done great PR damage to the cause of equal opportunities, helped along by some of the excesses perpetrated at the fringes.

Quotas have no place in thinking about equality in the UK but the choice is not between quotas or nothing. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown got perilously close to suggesting that little can be achieved until white men have adjusted their heads. This is a pessimistic and impractical prescription. Of course we all wish that racist, sexist or simply patronising ideas did not exist. However, you cannot tell all non-Wasps that they have to wait until this larger issue has been resolved.
John Carr,
London

YASMIN Alibhai-Brown throws away much of the force of her piece by arguing that anxieties about the corrosion of a British cultural identity need to be taken seriously.

Racism and nationalism are first cousins. The one cannot be attacked by making concessions to the other. Britishness is the name of state power. It had its last and most comprehensively unattractive outing when Mrs Thatcher used it to take on a tottering military dictatorship in the South Atlantic. Her example was soon followed by English football fans on the terraces of Europe.

But Britishness is now in rapid decay. It is a misreading to see the shrillness of the Tory Europhobes as anything other than the beginning of nationalism's end-game. Its future is Trooping the Colour on tins of shortbread for tourists.

We are witnessing an epic moment in the war against racism in the stand of the Transport and General Workers Union against the employment practices of Ford Truckfleet. An official of the rival union claims that the extreme rarity of black lorry drivers "may simply be because their superior intelligence says don't work in a shitty job for low pay" (TUC to rule on Ford race row, December 15). To dispose of such cynical white-collar racism requires precisely that we do not grace its indelible national identity with any legitimacy whatsoever.
Tom Snow,
London

THE article by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown highlights clandestine racism within employment practices and individuals' attitudes.

Racial discrimination has been historically rampant in highly paid jobs. I remember in 1966 when I was seeking a job as a print worker in Fleet Street. Their practices, then supported by the trade unions, were similar to those at Ford. Anxiety about its survival is a good sign.
Amin Mawani,
London

YASMIN Alibhai-Brown seems to be saying that now there are not enough low-grade jobs to go round and blacks are being kept out of those that there are by white competitors, black people with ability and money should try to join the middle classes.

She has done this herself by putting her son through a fee-paying school and at least trying to get him into Oxford. I wonder how this will go down with car workers suffering discrimination in Dagenham?

My own conclusion after 35 years of "race relations" research in Britain is that all that this will do is allow a few middle-class blacks to disassociate themselves from their fellows.

I am, of course, sad for these black and Asian middle classes that they should suffer discrimination at the higher levels and that they should be personally hurt. Frankly, however, this bears no comparison with the situation of those denied jobs altogether. I cannot see how making acceptance easier for monied blacks and Asians in professional jobs and the fee-paying educational sector will help.
(Prof) John Rex,
University of Warwick, Coventry

WHILE Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's strictures on racist attitudes will ring true among those who share her concerns about the deleterious effect of such prejudices, the story of a Muslim woman facing hostility from her work colleagues over the wearing of a headscarf (Appeal against 'hijab' racism, December 15) does not augur well for positive change.
W R Jackson,
Mansfield, Nottinghamshire

Selling death around the world

IS THERE nowhere that British arms cannot contribute towards death? The Middle East, South America, now Rwanda? Just how do those responsible live with their consciences and that includes members of governments who sit idly by?
(Dr) David Blest,
University of Tasmania,
Launceston, Australia

IF IT is so shocking to sell arms to Rwanda that we should declare it illegal, why is it acceptable to sell arms to Nigeria, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, to name only three repressive regimes? On December 8, you reported that a £200 million British overseas aid programme to Indonesia had been linked directly to multi-million-pound sales of arms and military aircraft.

Why does no one in Parliament speak out? Surely it could not be to protect the interests of UK firms?
Rae Street,
Littleborough, Lancashire

THE arms dealers who supplied the Rwandan regime before and during the 1994 genocide look like escaping their just deserts, thanks to registering on Mickey Mouse islands and the rumblings of free-market politicians suddenly concerned about the loss of jobs. Such difficulties could be surmounted by indicting them at the International Court of Justice as accessories to genocide. But I doubt very much that this will happen.
Colin Gill,
London

It's still the economy, stupid

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if born on American soil. The third was the character weaknesses of Clinton, a sly dig at the Whitewater embarrassments, and also at what the Republicans claimed was his feckless and casual way with foreign policy.

These proved inadequate as campaign themes in the face of Clinton's economic record and his skill at persuading the voters that he stood for a more congenial and less divisive set of traditional values. Few argued with Clinton's suggestion of school uniforms, or his cautious approval for teenage curfews. And his insistence that affirmative action could be "mended, not ended" to preserve the concept of fairness to the less privileged chimed with the essential generosity of most Americans, who are on the whole neither a mean-spirited nor a racist people.

Clinton's victory in the presidential election was matched by the Republican success in strengthening their grip on the Senate, and maintaining it — with a thin majority — in the House of Representatives. As for all but six of the past 28 years, the voters judged they would be safer with divided government in Washington. The six years when one party controlled both White House and Congress were the unlamented four years of the Carter presidency, and the unhappy first two years of President Clinton.

All this helps to explain why there was so much talk in the weeks after the election of "the vital centre". This rested on the assumption (rather, the pious hope) that Clinton and the chastened Republican leaders could govern well together, making common cause against the protectionist Democrats and the Republicans' religious right wing.

This would be more convincing were it not for the dog that did not bark during the campaign: the vulnerabilities of the White House to scandal, to harassment by congressional inquiry, and to the unfinished legal probes of the independent counsel, Kenneth Starr. The temptation to make use of these obvious weapons was very hard to resist for a Republican party whose internal divisions were best eased by their joint animosity to Mr and Mrs Clinton.

The potential of these scandals for damage was one clue to the fragilities of Clinton's second term. There were others, such as the way the Federal Reserve chairman, Alan Greenspan, sent the world's stock markets tumbling with his warning of "irrational exuberance", a clear suggestion that the Wall Street boom could not be long sustained. There were the rumblings of Kremlin instability, and there was China, whose tumultuous economic growth presaged a difficult geopolitical period. Clinton was driven in the spring to draw a line in the waters of the Taiwan Strait, dispatching two aircraft carrier task forces as a precaution against Chinese bullying. And there was Bosnia, where a kind of peace was maintained only by the deployment of US-led Nato forces.

"You can argue whether we have had peace or just an absence of war. But for a year, people have not been killed. This is a tremendous credit to Nato and I don't think any other military organisation could have done it," the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General John Shalikashvili, said earlier this month. He envisaged the new S-for (Stabilisation Force) of some 30,000 US and Nato troops remaining in Bosnia for another 18 months, with reviews every six months. He noted that the firm, one-year time limit for the length of the I-for mission had been a mistake — "the statements were far too positive as to when we'd get out".

"If the situation on the ground changes, we can quickly bring additional troops back to Bosnia," Gen Shalikashvili went on. "I am very confident that if military commanders report that the risk to their troops is such that more soldiers have to be brought in, I have no doubt that my government would agree."

Washington's armed forces are now increasingly ready to intervene in overseas crises when US national interests are only marginally concerned, in a world where the Nato alliance becomes the tool of choice for military action in the Middle East and Africa, Gen Shalikashvili added.

"This is no longer a world where you only limit yourself to vital interests," the Pentagon's top officer told a group of international correspondents in a year-end survey of the world. It was the clearest statement yet delivered of the new and complex strategic vision of the Clinton administration. In a broad survey of the US global role, which included a sharp warning over Chinese arms sales to Iran, the General revealed for the first time that he had recommended considering the use of Nato forces in Rwanda, and had discussed this with the United Nations secretary-general this summer.

"TODAY, we protect our interests when they are threatened, in order to shape the environment to ensure that what develops is in accord with our goals, using American military forces in situations when lesser interests are threatened so they don't grow," he said. "When I was Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, I thought the day would come when the Nato horizon would stretch beyond Europe. I can envisage the day when the member nations see it useful to deal with humanitarian and other operations in Africa or the Middle East, utilising Nato command and control."

A world view of this scope suggests that we are close to the high water mark of American power and ambition. A similar crest may looming in the stock markets, and possibly in the political fortunes of the Clinton presidency. This may all be too gloomy in such a triumphant re-election year, but there is an uncomfortable sense that Clinton, the Pentagon, and even the US economy, may have nowhere to go but down. But his legacy, as the free-trade president and the man who appears to be crafting the new consensus on foreign and domestic policies for a generation to come, is already in place.

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The collapse of communism was supposed to bring wonderful capitalism. But it never happened, writes **David Hearst** in Moscow

How the East was won — and lost

FLYING east to arrive in the habitual gloom of a landing at Moscow's Sheremetyevo's Airport, the British Airways flight from London was packed with wary travellers. It was December 1991, the last days of Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet Union. The Red Flag still flew over the Kremlin — but it only needed the merest of political events, a secret meeting between the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, for the symbol of the great empire's authority to come slithering down.

Sensing the moment, the plane-load of Westerners was full of nervous anticipation. My neighbour was a Belgian businessman who boasted to his colleague that the hangar that loomed large as the plane thumped its way towards the end of the runway was "theirs". They had bought the whole thing, or so they thought. Beside him was a German who was buying up Orders of Lenin or the Red Banner of Labour from cash-starved war veterans; and beside him was a man who called himself "a missionary from the Lord".

They were missionaries for no one but themselves. The democratic values they thought they were importing to Russia have been blown away, and the result is the sort of histrionic but fundamentally dangerous medieval feuding.

Western embassies in Moscow, susceptible to the claim that things have not turned out under Boris Yeltsin quite the way they had intended, have erected a temporary wooden palisade around their rather exposed positions. It consists of three arguments. Argument Number One: After 75 years of communism in which Russia was practically a militarised state, it would be folly to expect the transition period to go smoothly or quickly. It took 300 years to create the English lawn. There's no arguing with that.

Defence Number Two: Right or wrong, democrat or not, there was no practical alternative to supporting Boris Yeltsin, who, whatever else he has done, has submitted himself twice to popular vote and won fairly both times. Who else was there? Grigori Yavlinski, the young and popular liberal economist, but as yet nowhere near power. Governments have to deal with heads of states. Bad Boris was the "least worst" choice.

Plea-bargain Number Three: Let us not overestimate the West's influence on internal Russian politics. It is here that the fence has a gaping hole in it. Over the past five years, Russia has opened the door on the West almost painfully wide. The Western governments had an unexpectedly large amount of day-to-day influence on the governance of Russia. They decided when to turn on the financial taps to prop up the state budget, when to keep quiet (the CIA is very well informed about the murky events around the storming of the Moscow White House, the seat of a parliamentary rebellion in 1993) and when to turn up in person at Yeltsin's sick bed and declare him fighting fit.

In late 1991 and early 1992, the enthusiasm of the plane-load of free-market missionaries was matched only by the idealism and naïvety of their Russian hosts. Their belief in what the future held in store, how wealth would instantly and painlessly flow into Russia on a great tide of Western investment, was painful to witness.

I remember an old man staggering drunk up to the kiosk where I stopped to buy beer in a village outside Moscow. The sight of foreigners travelling freely outside Moscow was still new. Even the word "foreigner" in Russian had the same ponderous resonance that it had in Britain 40 years ago in the days when Benidorm was a fishing village and "wogs" were still deemed to start in Calais.

The man was drunk, and the sight of a battered Volvo produced an exaggerated effect on him: "Marvellous, these English cars. You know we were told for so long how stupid your Queen was, and how clever our Central Committee was. But you know we were the fools all along." That was the mood of the times. Self-abasement, rejection of Russia's past, even its cyrillic script in favour of English-language advertisements. It is here that nationalism was born as a creed that would take over from communism.

Consigned to history . . . Lenin out, McDonald's in. But for the Russian economy, where's the beef ?

This was a revolution, not a reform, and revolutionaries are sensitive to symbols. Moscow was littered with the icons of the new free-market messiah. Giant Coca-Cola cans were placed along Gorky Street, Moscow's main thoroughfare, which was renamed Tverskaya. All the names of the streets were changed, and for a time no one could tell where they were on the Metro.

The free market has arrived, but the belief that the West would help Russia has gone. With it has also died any faith that democratic values are the right ones for crisis-ridden Russia today. The former security chief, Alexander Lebed, describes himself as "half a democrat", and it can only be an outside chance that the strong hand that Russia's battered working classes are crying out for will be a fair and paternalistic one.

This cynicism is as much a reaction to Western policy as it is to continued industrial decline. It was the West which argued in the worst moments of the Yeltsin years that the ends justified the means, and it has been argued consistently.

Yes, the way Yeltsin dealt with a parliamentary revolt in October 1993 was clumsy and bloody, but it had to be done, for the greater good of keeping the assorted communists and fascists holed up in the building out of power. Yes, it is politically harmful virtually to exclude the middle ground of opinion from state television, in an effort to persuade the people that it's a choice between the Whites and the Reds, but everything is excused in the aim of keeping Gennady Zyuganov, leader of a broad alliance of communists and nationalists, out of power.

Yes, more people died in the Chechen conflict than at any time since the war in Afghanistan, but Russia is still allowed to become a member of the Council of Europe. The West protests about the tactics used, but not too loudly. Yes, the collapse of the state and the loss of law and order is harmful, but it's just a stage that many early capitalist states go through. That argument was made by an American ambassador in Moscow. In the light of the efforts that the FBI has made to highlight the dangers of Russian international crime, it is an ironic one.

Political pluralism, the rule of law, the distribution of power, fair elections, an independent media or free access to nationwide television in an election period — all of these principles have been quietly forgotten in the cause of the Greater Good.

The prism through which Russians see the West and interpret its intentions has turned. It takes no great depth of imagination to see how the patriotically minded might interpret the expansion of Nato eastwards as a threat. During perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev sold nuclear-arms reduction at home as an element of the "new political thinking" that was overtaking the old cold war partners.

Where is the "new political thinking" in Nato's expansion? Nato itself continues to be a military-led and US-dominated alliance. All Russian attempts to form a new European-based security structure have so far come to nothing. It is simply a non-starter, Russia is told.

The military tables have turned. It was once the West whose reliance on the nuclear shield was justified by the overwhelming number of Soviet tanks facing them. The same argument is now being used by Russia in reverse.

The missionaries have long since flown home. The quick bucks have been made, and what Russian industry needs is investors, not asset-strippers. It is clear that whoever becomes the next president of Russia, the basis for a non-democratic, authoritarian regime has already been laid.

The jury is out about how the next president of Russia will behave internationally. It was clearly not the West's intention to create an unstable Russia, playing the role in Europe of the dirty neighbour at the bottom of the garden who never cuts his grass. This is, after all, the post-Chernobyl age. But the question remains of the past five years of intense Western effort: did the West win the East or are we just about to lose it ?

Vote on Crimean port splits neighbours

James Meek in Moscow

HOSTILITY between the two largest states in eastern Europe increased sharply this month when the upper house of the Russian parliament accused Ukraine of illegally occupying Russian territory.

In an unexpected move, senators in the normally docile Federation Council voted overwhelmingly in support of two motions effectively demanding that Kiev recognises Sevastopol, on the Crimean peninsula, as a Russian city.

Both Russia and the international community have recognised Sevastopol as being part of Ukraine since the state became independent five years ago. "Unilateral actions by the Ukrainian side, aimed at seizing from Russia part of its territory, are not only illegal from the point of view of international law, but directly damage the security of Russia," said the council.

In a more sinister use of language, a second motion accused Ukraine of creating tension in the former Soviet Union by refusing to return Sevastopol.

The city is the main base for the former Soviet Black Sea fleet, which Moscow and Kiev have been trying to share out since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. But in recent months the focus of dispute has shifted to the status of the city itself.

The lower house of the Russian parliament, the Duma, has often made declarations on the Russian status of Sevastopol, which President Boris Yeltsin has promptly vetoed. But this is the first time that the upper house — previously a sleepy club of Yeltsin yes-men that could be relied upon not to rock the boat — has donned such aggressively patriotic colours.

President Yeltsin can and will veto the council. But it makes both him and the foreign ministry more isolated in their efforts to reach a compromise with Ukraine, a deal which the indignant Ukraininn parliament is becoming increasingly less willing to make.

The council, made up of the heads of Russia's 89 regions, has been energised in past months by a series of gubernatorial elections. New governors, such as Mr Yeltsin's old foe Alexander Rutskoi, are keen to flex their muscles, while old governors are desperate to show the electorate that they are more than just the Kremlin's vote-gatherers and subsidy-farmers.

The Sevastopol vote was prompted by the ambitious mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, whose campaign to repatriate the Crimean city is seen as part of his strategy to become president in 2000.

Mr Luzhkov argues that Nikita Khrushchev's 1954 "gift" of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine — both then part of the Soviet Union — did not include Sevastopol, which was administered separately by Moscow.

But the Russian Federation has since signed separate agreements with Kiev recognising Ukraine's new borders. Kiev insists that Russian recognition of a Ukrainian Sevastopol was one of the conditions under which it gave up its nuclear weapons.

Talks on a friendship treaty between the two governments have foundered because of the city, which is seen as the key to control of Crimea.

Had Ukraine not inherited the overwhelmingly Russian-speaking city it would scarcely have occurred to Kiev to ask for it. But now that it has it, the government feels it would be too humiliating to give it back.



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China picks a friendly tycoon

Andrew Higgins in Hong Kong profiles the man Beijing has put in charge of the former British colony

SOON after arriving in Hong Kong in 1983, the man appointed by Deng Xiaoping as China's plenipotentiary in the colony made a less than dazzling discovery. "I began to realise that the political inclinations of businessmen are usually linked to their business. They lean towards whoever supports them in trade or finance," recalls Xu Jiatun, China's senior official here until 1990. "I suggested that we use our resources to foster a group of pro-China capitalists."

The theory was quickly put into practice. In 1985, China stepped in with $120 million to help bail out the shipping empire of a Hong Kong family previously far more partial, at least in public, to Taiwan and Princess Grace of Monaco than the cadres of the Chinese Communist Party.

This month, 11 years after Beijing helped set up the world's third biggest corporate bail-out (after Chrysler and Lockheed), the businessman saved from bankruptcy has been named as Chris Patten's successor, the first post-colonial chief executive of Hong Kong.



Tung: bailed out by Beijing

Tung Chee-hwa, or C H as he is often called, is aged 59, a fan of Confucius who sends his children to university in America, a Chinese patriot who left China, a man whose given name means "build China" but who used to cheer on Liverpool Football Club.

"He owes China a big favour, but so do many businessmen," said David Chu, a property millionaire who met Mr Tung when they worked together at a General Electric plant near Boston in 1968. He sees Mr Tung's intimate connection with China as an asset not a handicap. "He knows how to communicate with Chinese leaders. They have a different set of values. Almost like alien beings."

In the weeks preceeding his confirmation by a carefully screened 400-member selection committee, Mr Tung has spoken Beijing's language. He emerged from relative obscurity to toe China's line with a consistency and vigour that has alarmed critics and surprised even some veteran pro-China politicians.

He told the democrats that they must change, warned Tibet support groups to pack their bags, echoed Chinese conspiracy theories about "hostile foreign forces", and declined to join those demanding leniency for the Hong Kong journalist Xi Yang, who was jailed for 12 years in China for an interest-rate scoop.

"He is going to do what he is told. He is going to be very tough and he will obey orders," said Emily Lau, a democrat member of the legislative council. "The things he has been saying in the past few weeks show us that he is through and through a Communist cadre."

Most of Hong Kong prefers to see a classic conservative, a view Mr Tung has encouraged by paying homage to Confucius at a Hong Kong temple and praising traditional values in an 18-page "election" manifesto. An official who knows him suggests that he wants to be "a Hong Kong Lee Kuan-yew" — Singapore's stern, paternalistic elder statesman.

But Mr Tung also has considerable charm and modesty. He waits in the queue at immigration, even in Beijing, and uses a BMW in a city with more Rolls Royces per capita than any other — though the car does carry the less than proletarian badge of the Corps Consulaire, an emblem of his role as honorary consul for Monaco.

Despite his years in Liverpool – he's a graduate in marine engineering from the university. San Francisco, Boston and the hybrid East-West city of Hong Kong, he champions the values of the country he left at the age of 12, when his father, C Y Tung, the founder of the family shipping fortune, fled Shanghai for Hong Kong just before Mao Zedong's revolution.

"The Americans attach a great deal of importance to their rights," he said recently. "I am not saying that they are wrong but I think, for us Chinese, obligations are more important." Such comments alarm democrats. Beijing, with its investment of trust and, in the past, money, is delighted.

"He is the type that appeals most to Chinese officials. He is very cautious. He is very careful about political correctness," said Tsang Yok-sing, leader of the Beijing-backed Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong.

But are these the talents needed to preserve the "high degree of autonomy" promised to Hong Kong after July 1 under the formula of "one country, two systems"?

Mr Tung's only experience in government was a four-year stint on Mr Patten's executive council, where he opposed political and most other reforms. Some even challenge his reputation in business, questioning a carefully constructed orthodoxy that he rescued the family shipping empire from his father's excesses.

But it was the near-collapse of the firm, with more than $2.5 billion of debt in September 1985, that helped launch Mr Tung's political career. It brought him into the orbit — and trust — of Beijing business interests and officials.

China's role in the bail-out was not formally acknowledged by Mr Tung until two months ago, a reticence attributed to the family's ties to Taiwan. The subject remains sensitive and rarely elicits more than brief answers.

Bankers involved in the rescue plan, which took nearly two years to put together, praise Mr Tung's powers of persuasion and tenacity. But the secrecy surrounding it remains a cause for concern.

"Why would the Communists lend so much money to the Tung family?" asked Ms Lau. "What is it between them. I don't think we will ever know. But that is a clear signal they know the family very well and trust them."

Anthony Hubbard in Wellington on the parties that have joined forces to govern New Zealand

Old political foes make strange bedfellows

NEW ZEALAND has a new electoral system and a new government headed by two bitter foes. Elections under the new German-style proportional representation system have forced the conservative prime minister, Jim Bolger, to team up with his old enemy, the arch-populist Winston Peters.

This month the two men smiled for the cameras and signed a coalition agreement — a political peace treaty ending years of mutual recrimination. Mr Peters, sacked from Mr Bolger's National cabinet in 1991, now returns as deputy prime minister and treasurer, a senior finance portfolio created especially for him. This completes an electoral revolution in New Zealand, where 12 years of radical Thatcherism have also brought economic and social upheaval.

In October, the country's first election under the new mixed member proportional (MMP) system left both the incumbent National and opposition Labour parties well short of a parliamentary majority. Neither side could form a government without the support of the 17 MPs of New Zealand First, the odd electoral force that Mr Peters founded in 1993.

Mr Bolger and the Labour leader, Helen Clark, were both forced to woo Mr Peters — a courtship that was long and extraordinarily complex. Finally, after eight weeks of secret talks, the kingmaker opted for National, a party whose rightwing economic and social policy he had condemned for many years.

The coalition agreement increases social spending, especially on health and education. But it makes only minor changes to economic policy — and has provoked cries of treachery from Mr Peters's supporters and critics alike. The coalition agreement was a catalogue of betrayal, says Ms Clark, who fought an effective campaign but managed to capture only 28 per cent of the vote.

The critics are now throwing back at Mr Peters some of the virulently anti-National rhetoric that he hurled during the election campaign. In August, for instance, he said: "The prime minister is not fit for the job, and come October he will be out." In his campaign opening in September, he said: "If you want National out, vote New Zealand first."

Asked to explain, Mr Peters says he chose the party which would best deliver his party's policies. He also puts some of the blame on Jim Anderton's Alliance, a leftwing party which broke away from Labour and won 10 per cent of the vote. A New Zealand-First Labour coalition would have needed support from the Alliance to get its legislation through — and Mr Peters has always believed that the Alliance was not a reliable partner.

Mr Peters's job as treasurer puts him above the finance minister, Bill Birch, a dour rightwinger who is a close friend of Mr Bolger. Mr Peters will now be in charge of the budget. But while he is in the engine room, the machinery remains largely the same and the free-market direction unchanged. The Reserve Bank Act, which required the governor Don Brash to hold inflation between 0 and 2 per cent, has been relaxed a little — he may now go to 3 per cent.

The other pillar of the monetarist regime — the Employment Contracts Act, a successful mechanism to break the power of the unions — will be softened a little, but not much. The basic free-market thrust of policy remains untouched, despite Mr Peters's endless denunciation of it. Under the coalition agreement, New Zealand First also wins five of the 20 cabinet posts.



Sparring partners . . . Winston Peters (left) and Jim Bolger seal their coalition deal
PHOTOGRAPH: MARK BOND

The coalition agreement includes some victories for Mr Peters. Social spending will increase by some NZ$5 billion over the three-year parliamentary term. A substantial increase in health spending might help to retrieve some of his popularity. National's far-reaching health reforms — which subjected hospitals to competition for funding and required them to make a profit — have proved deeply unpopular and were a major election issue. Peters can take the credit for forcing National to increase spending and to scrap the profit requirement.

Mr Peters largely lost his campaign to "cut immigration to the bone". He has run a controversial anti-immigration campaign, and critics accuse him of pandering to anti-Asian prejudice. But under the coalition pact immigration levels will continue at current levels.

But Mr Peters has forced the National Party to abandon the hated superannuation surcharge, a tax on wealthier pensioners. National promised at the 1990 election to scrap the surtax, but when it defeated the Labour government it broke its promise.

David Lange's Labour party broke a promise not to impose a surtax when it came to power in 1984 and began the free-market revolution.

Betrayal and broken promises have been the hot currency of political debate in New Zealand for 12 years. They forced a radical realignment of forces, as the Alliance broke away from Labour, and New Zealand First broke from National. Both accused the older party of treachery.

Disillusionment is also rife among Maori voters, who this year abandoned their 50-year-old support of Labour and massively backed New Zealand First. Mr Peters's decision to join National will be especially unpopular with Maori people. Some now predict that the five Maori MPs in his caucus will eventually split from the party. Mr Peters faces a huge challenge in winning over angry Maori voters. But he thrives on crisis and he has come back from political near-death many times before.

The move to MMP was an attempt by a disillusioned electorate to bring the politicians to account. Now some are arguing that Mr Peters's policy about-face suggests that MMP is no better than the old system. The long delay in forming a government has also bred some disillusionment.

Mr Lange, a critic of MMP, has excoriated Mr Peters and his protracted courtship by Labour and National. He said the two big parties had allowed New Zealand First to be "the tail that wagged the entire animal".

Coalition-building is a new experience for New Zealand, former home of a streamlined Westminster system where first-past-the-post governments wielded overwhelming power with less than 50 per cent of the vote. Even with an untried system, however, none of the pundits thought the process would take so long.

But these may be merely teething troubles. Coalition-building at the next election, due to be held in 1999, should go more quickly, if only because Mr Peters's preferred partner will be obvious to all: his old friend and foe, Jim Bolger.

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Seven months ago **Matthew Engel** paid his first visit to Israel and found it heading towards grudging acceptance of a state of Palestine. But on his return he finds a country split in two, extreme orthodoxy on the march, and fears growing of a new Middle East war

Hatred disfigures Promised Land

IT IS Monday morning, the time when 13-year-old Jewish boys come to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem for their bar mitzvah. The scene is probably more bewildering to anyone whose experience of these rituals has been confined to synagogues in London or Manchester than it is to a complete outsider. In Britain the bar mitzvah boy reads out his portion of the Torah in a nervous gabble amid a decorous hush. Here, at Judaism's most solemn and sacred place, there were a dozen competing ceremonies a few feet from each other.

The boys' thin voices never stood a chance. Their male relatives were alongside them chanting far louder and more confidently. And their mums and aunties — barred from the temple confines — were leaning over the fence, singing, cheering, throwing coins. From a distance the sounds merged into a general ululation, like an African funeral. Close to, the scene was more like a football match: joyous, fervent, irrational.

Twenty-four hours later, another group appeared. These were the Women of the Wall, who — far more quietly — exercised what they believed was their right to worship. They did not attempt to penetrate the men's section, which would have been an obvious provocation. However, a number were reportedly wearing kipot and tallitim — skullcaps and prayer-shawls — which are normally only worn by men.

They were ambushed by a group of Orthodox Jews who hurled chairs at them. The police ignored the attackers and threw the women out. "You can't pray like that," said one policeman. Later, a government minister told the women they were crazy and said, if they wanted equality, they could go to the beach or the disco.

Welcome to the New New Middle East. This is not the New Middle East promised by Shimon Peres before the Israeli election last May. Peres envisaged an Israel living in peace alongside an independent Palestine. This was specifically, if narrowly, rejected by the electorate. They chose Binyamin Netanyahu as prime minister instead.

For months Netanyahu has been saying that he is on the brink of achieving what might be regarded as his first success: an agreement for a partial withdrawal of Israeli troops from Hebron. This is a city where the normal difficulties of Middle Eastern politics are complicated by the presence of a few hundred militantly anti-Arab Jewish settlers in the heart of the city — among the people Israel conquered in 1967 and whose fathers and grandfathers massacred Hebron's original Jewish community in 1929.

But for many of Netanyahu's supporters this would not be a triumph but a betrayal. And in terms of his own mandate, it is not another step on the way to an independent Palestine, as it was meant to be, but a piece of unfinished business on which he could not renege. Assuming the withdrawal happens at all, it is not obvious when or, even if, the next step towards peace might come.

More than 12 months have passed since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, and seven months since the vote that brought Netanyahu to power. When I paid my first visit here just before the election, the road seemed open to a future of prosperity and, if not brotherly love, then at least a grudging co-existence between Israel and the incipient state of Palestine.

Now the landscape is transformed utterly. Israel's new rulers were elected to abort the idea of Palestine and to construct a different vision for their own state.

The nations of the world are united in their distaste for the new government. There are endless stories of the prime minister's technical incompetence and crassness, like his meeting with the head of the World Bank, who was obliged to listen to an hour-long economics lesson. Last month the Jerusalem Post, the new government's most reliable cheerleader, ran a major piece describing the appalling relationships between the prime minister and the military establishment and claiming that he no longer had any adviser who could give him accurate information about Arab thinking. As for his character, the most telling detail may be that after the election Netanyahu insisted he should no longer be known by his nickname of "Bibi", used by family, friend and foe since he was a baby. He thought it undignified. This was not the action of a man comfortable in himself.

Israel's enemies have always found it easy to make unjust comparisons with the old South Africa. But it gets easier when you read that the government is preparing plans to corral Israeli Arabs in the Galilee into blocks of flats to prevent them having a majority of the land; when you understand the reality that Orthodox groups, backed by American money, are buying Arabs out of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem in a systematic attempt to Judaise the area; when you witness the casual contempt with which Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem deal with Palestinians; and when you hear that, as in Britain, the government has lately revised the gun laws. This one, however, has been making it easier to carry one.

MORE often, though, Israel seems to be turning into Iran. Extreme orthodoxy is on the march, partly because people are turning to religion, partly because migration of Western, non-religious Jews is drying up, and partly because Orthodox Israelis breed like nuclear reactors: the 20 religious party MPs, for instance, have an average of six children each.

Incidents like the one at the Wall and bizarre rabbinical pronouncements are now routine. It still comes as a shock, though, to visit the Jewish West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba, just outside Hebron. Inside the gates there is a piazza leading to a beautifully-tended grave which is treated as a shrine. Bearded figures can be seen praying there regularly. It is the grave of Baruch Goldstein, who murdered 29 Arab worshippers in Hebron in 1994. This is not Judaism; this is barbarism. The government does not formally condone the veneration of Goldstein, any more than it condones the powerful undercurrent of sympathy for Yigal Amir, the fanatic who murdered Rabin. But the tone of the administration is one of lingering hate.



Voice of hate: rightwing fanatics heckle a Peace Now demonstration in Tel Aviv PHOTOGRAPH: JUDITH PASSOW

While Israeli negotiators were talking to Yasser Arafat's officials and trying to put together a deal on Hebron, I was talking to David Bar-Illan, the prime minister's policy director and — some say — his *éminence grise*. He is an urbane and pleasant individual. What he says is extraordinary. Had Netanyahu, I wondered, learned anything from his time of office, particularly from the débâcle over the opening of the temple tunnel in September, when rioting led to 75 deaths? "Yes," said Bar-Illan. "He's learned you can't trust the word of the Palestinian Authority. Before we worried about the violence from Hamas. Now we are worried about the Palestinian police.

"We expect Arafat to try it again. He doesn't like having to worry about book-keeping and garbage and that sort of thing. He loves tumult and turmoil and he thrives on it. One of the greatest crimes against Palestinians was getting him and his gangsters back from exile instead of democratising Palestinian society."

This does not sound like an administration serious about the possibility of peaceful co-existence. What is so astonishing is that, 49 years after the state's foundation, Israeli leaders are still unable to empathise with Palestinian resentments or to understand why Arafat has been such a successful articulator of them. Judaism is based on endurance and tradition and symbolism, not on rationality. Yet Israel expects the Palestinians to behave rationally, without regard to their own symbols or what is left of their dignity.

This incomprehension within the government is matched by the despair and bafflement of the defeated forces within Israel about their own failure. Peres's Labour Party — and this may be unique in the democratic world — represents an alliance between the business and the intellectual communities. A member of the Tel Aviv middle classes could spend years without meeting socially anyone who voted for Netanyahu's Likud.

The most coherent psephological explanation lies in the huge group of recent Russian immigrants, who voted for Rabin in 1992 and switched sides, partly in response to the bus bombings in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem which unhinged the promise of peace, and partly because their leader, Natan Sharansky, allied himself with Netanyahu.

BUT there is a vast mass of people who would have voted Likud anyway. Sederot is a town barely three miles from the Gaza Strip. Fifty years ago it was desert. Waves of migrants poured in from the countries where Jews were persecuted, first from North Africa, then from eastern Europe, to work, among other places, in the Osem chicken soup factory.

Just after the election, the local chief rabbi blocked the path of a funeral procession and forced the family of a two-year-old boy, who had been crushed by a car, to leave the cemetery and bury him in unconsecrated ground outside. He said the mother was insufficiently Jewish. This is not exactly the equivalent of Middle England. It is more like what the French call La France Profonde, the country's deep and secret heart.

Yet it is not an old-fashioned place. Sederot is still expanding; new homes are going up everywhere. Just a few miles away there are almost a million Palestinians desperate for work. But here they import contract workers from Turkey and Romania and fear the Palestinians more than they need them. "Do people in Sederot want to make peace with the Arabs?" I asked the felafel seller in the main square. He looked up and down the street then shook his head. "Naah," he said. Sederot voted more than two to one for Netanyahu over Peres. But they still may not get quite what they bargained for. When they see a foreign journalist, opposition politicians seem inclined to reject the most damning interpretations of Israel's situation. As one put it to me: "Bibi's a stupid idiot, but he's still our stupid idiot."

Most believe that if the worst did come to the worst the country would rally round as it always has done and that everyone would obey orders. But they also believe the worst will not come to the worst and that the Bar-Illan view may not, in the end, prevail. "I think Bibi really believes you can't trust those Arabs," said Uri Dromi, who was chief spokesman for the Rabin and Peres administrations. "But I also think he's trying to buy time. Buy time till what? Till the Arabs change and become someone else? Even if the government doesn't want peace, they can't go back."

"I think the peace process will continue," says Michael Keren, professor of political science at Tel Aviv University, "because Netanyahu is the product of the modern, democratic Israel. All the pressure — from the White House, business, the military, the technocrats, the media — is towards peace. I don't think he will be able to escape his destiny."

It will be a familiar sort of irony if one day Netanyahu joins his Likud predecessor, Menachem Begin, and Arafat himself on the list of unlikely winners of the Nobel Peace Prize. For the moment we have to content ourselves with the irony that a government elected to talk tough to the Arabs has found itself so globally reviled that its negotiating position has been immeasurably weakened. It is Netanyahu who needs the Hebron deal most urgently to prevent his government's international credibility disappearing completely. It is Arafat who suddenly and improbably seems the reasonable man.

The hope is that Keren is right and that Israel and Palestine's joint destiny has been postponed, not cancelled. The alternative is still too horrific to contemplate.

French racists win over workers

Alex Duval Smith in Paris

AFTER working his way up to the rank of senior prison officer, Damien Francès, aged 49, says he is proud never to have betrayed his working-class roots.

For the first 26 years of his career, he was an activist in the communist-dominated CGT trade union confederation. Then, a few months ago, he founded FN-Pénitentiaire — the National Front prisons union.

Across France, lifelong left-leaning men such as Mr Francès are taking similar steps. With a missionary zeal fired by anger at the posturing and sleaze of mainstream politics, police officers, transport and defence workers are securing grassroots bases for the extremist National Front.

But Mr Francès and those like him are not policy men. And while they admire the soapbox virtuosity of Jean-Marie Le Pen, some are appalled to be thought racist. Nevertheless, they want to consolidate the position of the immigrants-out party, whose leader gained 15 per cent of the vote in the first round of last year's presidential election.

Mr Francès said: "I voted Le Pen at the European, municipal and presidential elections. But before, in Mitterrand's day, I voted Socialist.

"I do not consider myself racist but the unions have let us down and Le Pen speaks sense where other politicians give us platitudes. The National Front's ideas correspond with mine — respect for discipline, patriotic values and the eminent social role of our profession."

Since Mr Francès registered FN-Pénitentiaire in September, he has recruited 45 of the 123 prison officers at Villeneuve-lès-Maguelonne jail, near Montpellier. Five other jails have created branches of the union.

Mr Francès, who claims the main trade unions have lost touch with their members, was inspired by the Front National Police, created a year ago. In workers' council elections last December, one in seven policemen voted for the FNP, giving it fourth position among 18 police unions and a voice on appointments boards. FNP's members are secretive and the only measure of the union's support is the claimed 10,000 circulation of its journal, Policier Français.

Alain Brillet, president of the Fédération Nationale Autonome de Police (FNAP), said: "For now the FNP is keeping a low profile. It just campaigns on two issues: restoring the death penalty and attempting to win the right for police to open fire even when not threatened."

But he said the FNP's presence could lead to explosive situations. "Among a riot police squad at Jarville, near Metz, 42.7 per cent of officers voted for the FNP last December. These people work on housing estates where there is much racial tension. In such a situation, there is a potential for a gang mentality among FNP supporters."

The emergence of National Front unions is in keeping with the party's policy of "going out on to the streets" — a populist approach contrasting with the Paris-centred activities of the main parties, including the Communists.

In October, the National Front's deputy leader, Bruno Mégret, launched a "campaign against globalisation" by leafleting striking workers at a Moulinex factory in Normandy. Activists attend all demonstrations against the big cuts in France's defence industries. And the party has created transport workers' unions in Lyon and Paris.

The party has tried to gain a foothold among teachers, by founding the Mouvement pour une Education Nationale (MEN), which has the same initials as the education ministry. But interest has been scant: less than 2 per cent of teachers voted for Le Pen in the presidential elections.

However, the party appears to be making inroads in traditionally unpoliticised areas; among college students and parents, and in seeking seats on housing association councils. Politicising the unpolitical is a tactic that has worked among French animal rights groups — which have a strong National Front base supported by Brigitte Bardot — and among traditionalist Roman Catholics.

Pascal Perrineau, a sociologist at the Centre d'Etudes de la Vie Politique Francaise, said: "The National Front's ideas are definitely progressing, but in a patchy way and mostly among people with few other political reflexes than protest and anger. There is widely felt distaste about corruption in the main four parties and, in that context, Le Pen appears clean."

arbeitslos

The optimism of unification in 1990 has soured for many east Germans, with one in four facing unemployment PHOTO: THOMAS HOPKER

Bitterness as Germans fail to bridge east-west divide

Ian Traynor in Bonn

EAST GERMANS see themselves as losers in the lottery of unification. For most of the 17 million people in the five east German states, the euphoria of the turn of the decade which filled the skies over Berlin and Leipzig with cries of "We are one people, one country" has evaporated.

What was being billed a few years ago as the east German success story has turned sour. Seven years after the Berlin Wall fell — and after a colossal 1,000 billion Deutschmarks have been pumped into the east — its economic growth will be lower than western levels for the first time next year.

"The transfers have not been able to put the east German economy on a self-sustaining growth path," says Thomas Mayer, chief economist at Goldman Sachs in Frankfurt. "They've been used mainly to fund consumption and to kickstart the construction sector, which is now failing."

Berlin itself is broke. Stripped of the subsidies that kept it going as the showcase window on the West through the cold war, the city staggers from one budget crisis to the next, with alienation between its eastern and western sections all-pervasive.

From the rusting shipyards of the Baltic coast to the industrial wastelands of the southeast, the picture is grim. And people are gloomy.

Franz Schuster, economics minister of the eastern state of Thuringia, verges on panic as he describes the crises and problems piling on his desk. "The economic recovery has stopped here," he says. "We're stuck in a downward spiral that means 25 per cent of our firms could be threatened with closure over the next year."

Real, as opposed to official, unemployment means that one in four east Germans will be out of work next year, according to a report in October by a panel of economic advisers to the government.

This is not the way things were supposed to be. The pan-German script penned by Chancellor Kohl in 1990 infamously looked forward to "flourishing landscapes" in east Germany within five years, suggesting that a few years of hard graft would seamlessly knit the two parts of the country together.

The subsidies and investment would trigger an east German boom, which in turn would feed into west German growth. Instead, politicians and analysts now admit it will take at least a generation — perhaps 70 years — for standards of living to become level. If they ever do.

"You can no longer speak of an economic equalisation, but of a widening discrepancy between east and west," says Wolfgang Thierse, deputy chairman of the opposition Social Democrats, and himself an east German.

This is not just the opposition berating Mr Kohl. The chancellor's conservative supporters at the influential Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung talked witheringly last month of Germany's economic unification being the "most expensive disaster since the war".

Meanwhile west Germans increasingly resent paying a 7.5 per cent tax surcharge to fund the east, and view easterners as whingers and subsidy junkies. The tax is called the "solidarity surcharge". Increasingly, this is a misnomer.

For their part, east Germans hate being patronised by the westerners, whom they view as interlopers and carpetbaggers who have hijacked their country and culture.

Politically and diplomatically, German unification was an undiluted triumph for Mr Kohl.

But however formidable his talents as a politician, Mr Kohl's strong suit is not economics. His one-to-one fusion of the two German currencies in 1990, over the heads of Bundesbank opposition, was a political imperative and a huge economic liability.

Six years on, the result is that eastern Germany is probably the most expensive manufacturing venue in the world, lagging well behind its post-communist Polish and Czech neighbours in growth and optimism.

"West German unit labour costs already top the league table of industrialised countries and in the east the unit labour costs are 30-50 points higher because of the productivity gap," says Mr Mayer. "That means nobody invests in the east to make profits, but to get subsidies."

Belgium's wealthy north shuns south

Stephen Bates in Brussels

THE most common car sticker in Brussels displays the red, gold and black national flag and announces defiantly: "United Belgians We Will Remain."

That it does so in three languages — French, Flemish and German — gives a clue to the tensions it seeks to defuse in a country barely 300km across and 150km from top to bottom. Belgium is preoccupied with separatist tendencies, at least as far as the Flemish north is concerned.

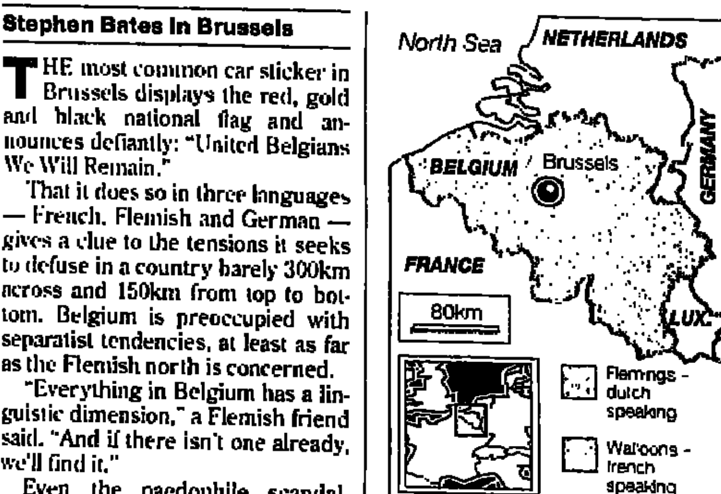
"Everything in Belgium has a linguistic dimension," a Flemish friend said. "And if there isn't one already, we'll find it."

Even the paedophile scandal, which has done much to unite the country in horror and grief, has a regional subtext. All the accused and all the victims in the early stages were Walloons — French speakers from the south and east. The discovery of the bodies of two Flemish teenagers buried under a workshop in Charleroi owned by the chief suspect, Marc Dutroux, added a new dimension.

While An and Eefje were still missing, the Flemish papers gave them priority over Melissa and Julie, the eight-year-olds whose abduction transfixed the Walloon community and whose discovery, buried in another of Mr Dutroux's back gardens, caused a national outpouring of emotion.

The Flemish north — geographically smaller but now with a slightly larger population — is exercising its new economic superiority, after many years of inferiority to the Walloons.

Hugo Schiltz, mayor of Antwerp, Belgium's second city, which is in



Flanders, said: "Many Flemings feel that our contribution to Wallonia is too high. I am a citizen of Belgium but my nationality is Flemish."

From the Francophone side, Jean Stengers, a former professor of history at the Université Libre in Brussels, said: "There is a deepening ditch between the two communities, different cultural and political élites. They lead separate lives, read different newspapers, watch their own television channels. We are condemned to live together but always to be in conflict."

Belgium's federal structure, adopted in 1993, gives administrative autonomy to three regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. The arrangement is due to be reviewed in 1999. The national government, led by Jean-Luc Dehaene, a Flemish Christian Democrat, has Flemish and Walloon ministers and French-socialist backing.

Only the rightwing nationalist Vlaams Blok calls openly for independence for Flanders, but the more moderate parties also want greater devolved powers. The call centres on winning control of the social security budget.

For the first 150 years of the Belgian state, the Walloons — with heavy industry based on the mines and steel works of Liège, Namur and Charleroi — economically supported the farmers of Flanders. In the last 20 years, hi-tech industries have expanded in Flanders, while industrial plants in the south have decayed.

As well as an unemployment problem, Wallonia has an ageing population and a more socialist, interventionist tradition. The Flemish say they are paying too much to support the south — estimates vary from \$1.5 billion to \$8 billion a year — but no one has done a definitive calculation.

Pieter Vandermeersch, deputy editor of De Standaard, the Flemish broadsheet, said: "Before 2000, Wallonia will have to accept a degree of separatism. If not, Belgium will explode, violently perhaps."

At the heart of the separatist dilemma is the almost certainly insuperable problem of Brussels. It is surrounded by Flemish-speaking areas. Flanders claims it as its capital. But 85 per cent of its population speaks French. The Bruxellois do not identify much with either the Flemish or the Walloons. But neither side could cede control of the capital.

Mr Stengers believes an even greater force will keep Belgium together: the huge national debt. "Our debt is the greatest cement for national unity. Trying to divide it would mean the collapse of Belgian economic credibility."

Architect of choice for capital projects

Sir Norman Foster won the competition to build a new pedestrian bridge for London. Who's surprised? He wins them all, writes **Dan Glaister**

AND the winner is . . . For architects and followers of architectural news there is little suspense to be had at the announcement of competition winners. The envelope is passed, a hush descends, and surprise, surprise, the name Sir Norman Foster is breathed into a microphone. This familiar plot was played out earlier this month when Sir Norman was revealed as the winner of the competition to design a £10 million pedestrian bridge across the Thames near St Paul's Cathedral.

This is the same Sir Norman Foster who in November won a £250,000 competition to revitalise the centre of London. Back in June he announced a £160 million plan to redevelop Wembley Stadium. Shortly afterwards, his plans for a giant, £200 million motorway and viaduct linking south-west France and Spain at the Tarn Gorge were



Foster : everyone's favourite

unveiled, and in mid-September he found time to announce plans for a £550 million, 1,265-foot tower in the City of London, aka "Foster's phallus".

Plans, plans, plans. Casual observers of stories about buildings could be forgiven for thinking that there is only one *britisher architekt* of any note, or at a push two. The great British architecture double act is Richard Rogers and Sir Norman Foster. Can you tell them apart (aside from one being grumpy and the other charm personified)? Could you identify one of their buildings — excluding the unbuilt phallus — at 500 paces? Probably not, but the pair nevertheless exercise a firm grip on British architecture.

Now, with the latest string of victories, and particularly in beating Lord Rogers in the competition to revitalise central London, Sir Norman is pulling ahead. (Rogers, after stealing a march on his early friend with the Pompidou Centre, now has to make do with the comparative wooden spoons of the Millennium Wheel and the Greenwich dome housing the Millennium exhibition, should it go ahead.)

This, we are told, is a golden age for British architecture. The wonder that is the National Lottery has, whatever its faults, released a mass of funds for capital projects. The Tories, in setting up the National Lottery, knew who their friends were. The construction industry, as all Tory grandees know, must be kept happy. From buildings shall the trickle-down economic miracle flow.

Part of the explanation for Sir Norman's success is that he has the track record and the clout to get things done. His imposing office overlooking the Thames at Battersea exudes power and confidence. And it is an impressive record. He made his breakthrough in the mid-eighties with the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, the feng shui skyscraper shooting daggers at the bank's rivals. Stansted airport is his best-known British building to date.

He is currently involved in the Chek Lap Kok airport in Hong Kong, the Reichstag in Berlin, the Millennium Tower in Tokyo — the world's highest at 2,500 feet — and another, comparatively small skyscraper in Frankfurt. Skyscrapers in Seoul and Riyadh also beckon, as does the British Museum, which, that institution's shaky finances permitting, he is due to remodel.

The consulting engineers for Sir Norman's Thames bridge proposal are Ove Arup & Partners. Sir Norman has the contacts and the muscle to get things done. Other designers such as Zaha Hadid may produce more startling designs, so seems to run the thinking on competition juries, but if you want to make sure your dreams turn into bricks and mortar, choose Normy.

With six offices worldwide, Sir Norman can oversee all this work, and enjoy the playboy hobby of piloting his private jet, perhaps stopping off somewhere for a spot of skiing, or whatever fashionable pastime has taken his fancy. Last year his salary more than doubled, from £209,000 to £457,000. His company, Foster Holdings Ltd, in which he has an 80 per cent stake, showed a 21 per cent jump in profits to £1.2 million in the year ended April 1995. Three-quarters of the company's turnover in that period came from the Far East and continental Europe. But with the help of the newly unleashed public enthusiasm for construction projects in this country, that is changing. Sir Norman's profile in Britain is rising fast.

With the turnover comes the lifestyle. Sir Norman's first wife, the architect Wendy Cheesman — with whom he had four sons — died of cancer in 1989. In 1990 he married Begum Sabiha Rumani Malik, who was to gain notoriety for suing UK customs for "slander by conduct" after being searched with her daughter at Heathrow. She lost the case, and the prosecuting counsel made the papers with his description of her as an "insufferable snob". The snobbishness seeped into the office: Lady Foster started to take a part in the workings of the company, and staff were given instructions about forms of address for the couple.

The marriage didn't last; the couple separated last year. Sir Norman's new partner is more in keeping with his cultivated image: younger, Spanish — Foster is lionised in Spain — with a saucy, nudge-nudge background as a TV sexologist, and a respectable present as a Cambridge academic.

It's not bad for a working-class boy of humble origins. Now 61, Sir Norman was a council worker and national serviceman before leaving for the United States in 1962 to study under Sir James Stirling. There he met Richard Rogers, returning to Britain to form Team 4, comprising the two men and their wives. The experiment didn't last, and Foster set up his own practice in 1967. He has an eye for dates. If 1967 represented the high point of an early enterprise culture, more than 20 years later he received his knighthood at the height of another. It was just in time. In 1990, the same year as he received his knighthood, the property boom nosedived.

But are his buildings any good? Part of the answer is to be found by asking other architects. This is instructive. Sir Norman is considered an architect's architect, even down to his renowned abrasiveness. His fellow professionals praise his clean designs, the quality of his drawing, the thoroughness of his work, the attention to detail, the after-sales service. Above all, they say, he satisfies the client.

And what do the clients think? Part of the answer is to be found by asking the people who live and work in his buildings. Reactions are mixed. He finishes on time and on budget. But his recent design for the new law faculty at Cambridge university, opened by the Queen, has come in for criticism from students and dons. Their complaint was that the open-plan design captures not only the light, but the noise as well. "It is a typical example of architects designing for themselves and not for the people who use their buildings," says one don. Sir Norman's office apparently argued that sound levels were subjective. A team of independent consultants was called in.

Whatever the merits of his designs, we are sure to see more of him. Sir Norman, despite Lord Rogers's wheel and dome, is the man bent on designing the next millennium for Britain. It is a potent ambition.

THE artist's impression (above) shows how the new £10 million pedestrian bridge across the Thames will look when the project is completed, *writes Dan Glaister*:

The organisers hope that the construction, which will run from below St Paul's Cathedral on the north bank to the Bankside power station, the site of the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art — the first to be built across the Thames in more than a century — will be finished in time for the opening of the Bankside gallery in spring 2000.

Risks grow for London homeless

James Meikle

LIFE expectancy for those living on the streets of London has dropped to an average age of 42, from 47 four years ago, according to the homelessness charity, Crisis.

A third are dying from natural causes such as heart conditions, but suicide, drug abuse and pneumonia are also common causes of death, according to records of coroners' courts in the capital.

The figure of 74 fatalities last year was only slightly down on the 86 in 1992, despite indications that the number of people sleeping rough may have dropped by two-thirds over the same period.

This indicates how much work may remain to tackle the remaining "hard core" of those on the streets, despite a £180 million government programme over the past six years. Crisis believes the figures underestimate the number of deaths because not all are referred to a coroner. The true total may be nearer 150.

An annual one-night street count of people sleeping rough in central London this year recorded 375, but the total number who are on the streets at least once in a year may be as high as 2,500, according to Crisis. It says there are rising numbers of young people on the streets.

Its report, published to coincide with the opening of its winter shelter network, said the average age of a rough sleeper dying from natural causes in London was 46, and that street dwellers were 35 times more likely to commit suicide, and four times more likely to die from unnatural causes such as accidents, assaults, murder and drug or alcohol poisoning. The death rate of the homeless compares with a national average life expectancy of 76.

Mark Scothern, the chief executive of Crisis, said: "Someone dies on the streets of London every five days. They die well before their time, in discomfort and without dignity."

The government programme had "tackled those who are relatively easy to help and, thank God, it has been able to do so" but help could not come quickly enough for others, on whom painstakingly long-term work is needed, he said.

It was often very difficult to integrate someone back into the mainstream of society after only three weeks' homelessness because they had adapted to their situation.

Simon Ramsden, a GP at Great Chapel Street practice, in Soho, central London, where one patient dies about every 10 days, said: "Being homeless is a violent, dodgy existence. Every couple of months I would expect to see someone who has been severely injured by someone attacking them.

"There is a trend to see homeless people as an easy target for a bit of thuggery, with people taking a sadistic pleasure in torturing someone when they are at their most vulnerable, in a sleeping bag, when they can't just run off."

A spokesman for the Department of the Environment said: "We question the statistics but one premature death is one too many."

Still Dying for a Home; Crisis, Challenger House, 42 Adler Street, London 1E 1EE; £8

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Tories totter on the brink of defeat

James Lewis



'VERY WELL, ALONE'

IF 1996 did nothing else, it strengthened the case for fixed-term parliaments. But, because the prime minister of the day remains free to go to the polls at a time of his own choosing, the nation was forced to endure a year of non-stop electioneering.

John Major's parliamentary majority was steadily whittled down by defections, deaths and byelections, and the Conservatives enter the new year as a minority government — the first in Britain for 17 years. The minority Callaghan government of the late seventies muddled along reasonably well with Liberal support, but Mr Major will find it much harder going.

Leading a party that is almost suicidally riven over Europe and monetary union, Mr Major could easily be brought down by a motion of no confidence between now and May, when a general election must be held. Pundits are already speculating that he may be forced to go to the country in February or early March.

The Home Secretary, Michael Howard, spent most of the year asserting the Conservatives' credentials as the party of law and order — a sure-fire vote-winner in the past. So the police got CS gas sprays, long-handled batons, and strengthened powers to stop and search. There is to be a national police squad to tackle fraud, drug-dealing and money laundering, and there were new laws to prosecute stalkers and to ban the ownership or sale of handguns over .22 calibre. And there may yet be a law to outlaw "Rambo" knives.

Around 80 per cent of the 250,000 handguns once held legally will now be outlawed. But shotguns, which can also kill people, escape the ban. In Britain, shooting is associated with landowning; joining a good shoot is a big step up the social ladder in the shires.

The handgun ban — strongly opposed by shooting clubs — was in response to the killings of 16 children and a teacher at Dunblane in March. Lord Cullen, who chaired an inquiry into the massacre, considered that tighter control over the issue of gun licences could have prevented it. But Mr Howard insisted on being tougher, though not so tough as many opposition MPs who demanded the banning of hand guns altogether.

Although it was an isolated incident, the Dunblane shooting, together with a machete attack on Birmingham schoolchildren by a paranoid schizophrenic, and the murder of a headmaster by a knife-wielding teenager, greatly heightened the public perception of crime and encouraged fevered calls for a restoration of "moral values".

Frances, the eloquent wife of the murdered headmaster, Philip Lawrence, caught the public imagination with her campaign for "moral regeneration", though no one seemed to know quite how to set about it. Broadcasters were urged to curb the portrayal of violence on TV, and the Government promised to restore religion to the schools' curriculum. The Labour party even toyed with the idea of a "national bedtime" for children.

Mr Howard's zeal brought him into conflict with the British and European courts, which repeatedly overturned his decisions as being either illegal or an abuse of his power. And his harsh proposals for American-style minimum sentencing also put him at odds with the judiciary, which complained that the Home Secretary was high-handedly usurping its powers.

The outgoing Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, pointed out that Britain has had more Criminal Justice Acts in the past six years than in the previous 60, and complained about the damaging effect of wild swings in penal policy. Although the 1991 Criminal Justice Act aimed to reduce the numbers of those given custodial sentences on the grounds that prison simply did not work, Mr Howard hared off on an opposite course that will increase the prison population — already a record 52,000 — by more than a quarter in the next decade.

Lawyers stand to profit handsomely from the sudden British appetite for American-style compensation demands. Policemen were awarded £1 million for the "trauma" they suffered in helping victims of the Hillsborough football disaster in Sheffield, when fans were crushed to death in an overcrowded enclosure; "stressed" parents of children killed by a hospital nurse got £500,000. Huge sums continued to be paid out to Service women and homosexuals claiming wrongful dismissal from the armed forces.



Grieving widow Frances Lawrence led calls for a moral crusade

The latest demand is by two 17-year-olds who, because they got poor exam results, have started proceedings against their school. Perhaps the Government is partly responsible. By promoting Citizens' Charters, and pushing public services to publish performance records, it has encouraged the idea that those which do not meet measurable standards, such as school league tables, should pay compensation. Soon, it was suggested, children might be suing their parents for bringing them into such an uncertain world in the first place.

The threat of litigation may be raising the social costs of bad decision-making. Environmental health officials, for example, delayed publishing lists of shops selling meat that was suspected of causing the latest outbreak of food poisoning in Lanarkshire for fear of action by a wrongly-identified shop.

Education, clearly marked as an election issue, was seldom out of the news. When the number of passes in A level exams continued to rise, there were cries of "falling standards". Teachers rebutted the claim, but the Education Secretary, Gillian Shephard, is to make the exams harder — a ploy which may at least reduce the demand for university places. Meanwhile, the universities, hard-pressed for funds, threatened to impose education fees of around £1,000 a year on students, on top of the money most of them now have to borrow to maintain themselves.

The Prime Minister spoke of his vision of "a grammar school for every town", though Labour retains its faith in a non-selective, comprehensive system of schools. But Labour's leader, Tony Blair, and a leading front-bencher, Harriet Harman, chose to send their own children to grant-maintained or selective schools. Leftwingers muttered their displeasure, but few dare rock the Labour boat with an election in sight.

Although the Government could hardly be blamed for "mad cow disease" — bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE — it was blamed for the way it handled the consequences of the disease and for its failure to persuade the European Union to lift the ban on the export of British beef world-wide. Because of the link between BSE and scrapie in sheep, the Germans banned the import of British lamb as well.

Livestock farmers were furious, not only over the order to cull all dairy cattle more than 30 months old — which, on some veterinary evidence, is unjustified and unnecessary — but over what they consider to be niggardly compensation payments and the slowness in carrying out the cull because of insufficient incinerators.

Two children were found, in March, to have the form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease which has been linked to BSE, but there has been no further evidence to suggest that beef is any longer unsafe. Although British beef consumption slumped by nearly 30 per cent early in the year, it was, by December, only 3 per cent below pre-scare levels. But the export ban will remain in place until EU ministers are satisfied that the cull has been completed.

A year ago, Mr Major looked with hope to a peace settlement in Ireland — an achievement that would revive his party's flagging fortunes and win him an honoured place in the history books. But it was not to be. The IRA "ceasefire" came to an end in February with a huge bomb blast in London's Canary Wharf, followed in June by a bomb which made Manchester's centre look like Beirut, blitzed 670 businesses and caused damage put at £500 million.

After much procrastination, Ulster Unionists agreed to accept an American, George Mitchell, as chairman of the peace talks in Belfast, which took months even to arrive at an agenda. In the absence of a new ceasefire, the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, remains excluded from the talks. Britain now demands a "definite and lasting ceasefire", and proof that terrorists have halted all violent activities, such as "punishment beatings", and stopped building up weapon supplies, before Sinn Fein can be allowed in.

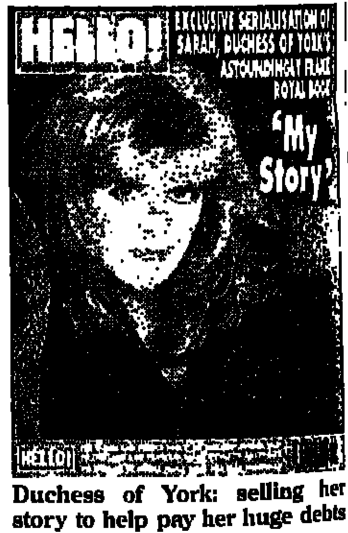
"Socialist" may be a banned word in Mr Blair's new Labour party, but in some constituencies its banner will be flown by the Socialist Labour party formed by Arthur Scargill, leader of the fast-dwindling National Union of Mineworkers. It won few defections from the Labour party or the trade unions.

Mr Blair has told the unions they can expect no special favours if Labour wins the election. They may get a national minimum wage, though not necessary the hourly rate of £4.26 which they demand. Nor will new Labour rescind the anti-union legislation of the Thatcher years. The Government now threatens public sector unions with even more legislation to curb their activities. They could be required to give longer notice of intended strike action, and customers may be empowered to sue them for compensation if they suffer losses through strikes. This was another "tough" response to a few 24- and 48-hour stoppages by postal workers and sporadic stoppages by drivers on the London Underground.

Meanwhile MPs voted themselves a pay rise of 26 per cent, 10 times the rate of inflation, while urging restraint on everyone else.

According to the world's lifestyle pages, London became everybody's favourite place: the hub of the fashion world, with the trendiest bands, the best art scene and the hippest atmosphere. Respondents to a survey of 500 world companies considered it to be the best place to do business. They reckoned it had the best access to markets, best availability of office space, best telecommunications, best transport links with other cities, and was easiest to travel around in. Their only big complaint was about pollution.

The city itself was more sceptical. A report on "A Capital Divided" pointed out that London's living costs were the highest in the country, and that the capital had more low-income — as well as more high-income — families; that Inner London, where poverty is concentrated, had more people sleeping rough, more people with mental illness and a higher rate of infant mortality than anywhere else.



Duchess of York: selling her story to help pay her huge debts

The royal family continued to delight its detractors and add to the despair of those who bemoan the lowering of moral standards. The marriages of the Prince of Wales and his brother, the Duke of York, were both dissolved. As the mother of the second in line to the throne, Princess Diana — now Diana, Princess of Wales — received a comfortable settlement of £20 million but is no longer Her Royal Highness.

Fergie, the Duchess of York, fared rather less well and is reportedly in debt to the tune of more than £3 million. But sales of her autobiography, trailed in Hello! magazine, suffered from the earlier publication of a more lurid account of her sexual exploits.

The entire royal family met to discuss ways of "modernising" themselves, possibly by slimming down what they describe as the Firm, but nothing emerged. There were suggestions that the Prince of Wales might make more public appearances in the company of Camilla Parker Bowles, with whom he admits having an affair when he was still married. Public opinion, however, shows no sign of warming to the idea of a Queen Camilla.

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Le Monde

France stands alone in row with US

Alain Frachon

FRANCO-AMERICAN relations are showing signs of wear and tear. This is nothing new: relations between the two countries have always involved periods of calm followed by phases of misunderstanding. Indeed, the gulf between France and the United States is a standard topic on the opinion pages of US newspapers.

Recently, the air of misunderstanding has hotted up, resulting in open conflict. Both sides may point out that Clinton and Chirac are hitting it off marvellously, or swear that the bilateral relationship is strong enough to allow differences of opinion. But the fact remains that the list of differences is growing dangerously longer.

Africa is the most recent subject of dispute. The row between Jacques Godefrain, the French minister with special responsibility for co-operation, and the outgoing US secretary of state, Warren Christopher, over the legitimacy of their respective countries' interests on the continent has been superseded by a dispute centring on the Great Lakes region of Africa.

The area, rich in the raw materials for fuelling such disputes, includes the vast expanse of Zaire, the English-speaking region of Uganda, and francophone countries such as Burundi and Rwanda.

Each side suspects the other of having dark intentions. Paris believes that Washington is engaging in a "regional ploy" by supporting the "Tutsi connection" that holds power in Kampala, Kigali and Bujumbura in order to carve out a sphere of influence in the region — a policy that is apparently pursued at the risk of destabilising Zaire, or even favouring the break-up of the country. The US State Department's denials of this accusation have sounded rather limp.

Paris has come close to accusing Washington of torpedoing a planned military-humanitarian operation in the region in order not to impede the gains of Zaire's rebel Tutsi guerrillas, who are supported by Rwanda. Washington, meanwhile, is inclined to suspect Paris of wanting to mount the operation in order to help Zaire's president, Mobutu Sese Seko, whose regime is slowly collapsing.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali's bid for a second term as United Nations secretary-general is another issue likely to leave scars and to hamper co-operation between the two countries' diplomats at the UN.

By throwing its weight behind the Egyptian diplomat — a French-speaker and a regular guest in French ministerial circles — France was seen to be taking an honourable stand for the cause of the Third World, and particularly Africa, and the French language. It was regarded as a battle to be conducted with panache, as in the heyday of Gaullist diplomacy.

Unfortunately, after assailing Washington's clumsy anti-Boutros-Ghali demagogy and congratulating the French on their diplomacy, the Africans realistically, if ungratefully, signalled they had decided to drop Boutros-Ghali and, by the same token, Paris.

In the Middle East, the US did not appreciate the way France barged into the diplomatic arena during the confrontation in Lebanon between Israel and the Syrian-backed Hizbullah militia.

Far more serious, however, is the dispute over Nato. President Jacques Chirac, aware that his partners in the European Union would not follow him in building a European defence outside Nato, decided to take France back into the organisation's military structure (which it left in 1966).

But Chirac will not go any further, except on one condition: France wants a truly European presence in the alliance's command structure. The US strongly opposes the idea. An exchange of notes between Clinton and Chirac does not seem to have helped to bring the two parties any closer.

If this quarrel is not settled, it could have lasting and very negative repercussions on an issue that is essential to the future of the EU — the constitution of a European defence.

France does not want the maintenance of a strong transatlantic link to provide the impetus for an increase in America's sphere of influence.

Unfortunately, Paris finds itself alone on this point, its view not really shared by its European partners. But the truth is that the European positions put forward by France are not even shared outside the Elysée Palace.

France attributes to its partners a "European desire" in the diplomatic and military areas, and especially a "desire" to be free of the US, which they do not share. And this view is likely to receive even less enthusiasm from the new members of Nato, to be drawn from eastern Europe.

So the current friction between Paris and Washington also reflects a problem in European relations: the gap between what France and the other member states expect of the European Union.

(December 10)

Colombian army link to death squads

Anne Proenza in Bogotá

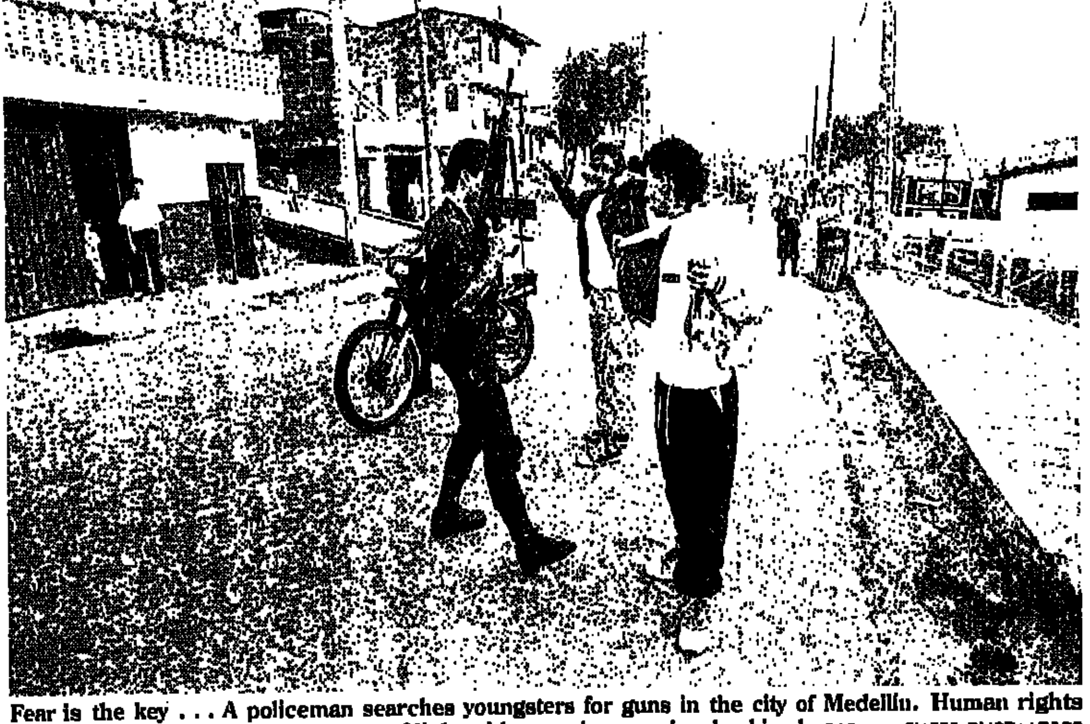
HUMAN rights violations in Colombia have taken a turn for the worse, and attention was drawn to this on December 10 when France's Human Rights Prize was awarded to the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Action Group.

Highly damaging accusations have been made in recent Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports on Colombia, and both organisations are urging the United States to suspend military aid to Bogotá immediately to curb the activities of paramilitary units involved in serious rights violations.

The European Parliament passed a similar resolution on October 24, while the United Nations decided — with the approval of the Colombian government — to open an office of the Human Rights Authority in Bogotá.

The Colombian daily El Tiempo reports that in the past two weeks at least 73 people were killed by paramilitary groups in the north of the country. These groups, whose numbers are estimated at about 2,500 men, are increasing their influence, especially in the Urabá, Córdoba, Magdalena Medio, Llanos and César regions.

A "secret" document widely circulated in the country reveals that a "third Colombian national self-defence meeting" recently decided to make the paramilitary groups the "spearhead of the struggle" against the guerrilla movement because the "Colombian armed forces are operationally incapacitated", hamstrung by "pressures from human rights groups and other institutions".



Fear is the key . . . A policeman searches youngsters for guns in the city of Medellín. Human rights organisations accuse security forces of links with armed groups involved in abuses PHOTO: TIMOTHY ROSS

On December 8, the Colombian defence minister, Juan Carlos Esquerra, reacted sharply to another massacre of 11 peasants reportedly carried out by a paramilitary group. He declared that he could not have people "taking the law into their own hands". However, according to Human Rights Watch, most of the paramilitary groups have been set up with the approval of the military authorities.

A report drawn up in 1992 by several human rights groups claims that many high-ranking officers, including generals, have been involved in operations later blamed on paramilitary groups. In the absence of documented charges, however, the military's guilt has never been proven.

The Colombian ambassador in Brussels, who has since resigned, was denounced by the European Parliament, which suspected him of using armed groups to clear peasants off his property.

The activities of these paramilitaries are determined as much by self interest as by political objectives. Over the past 10 years, landholders and drug traffickers have been financing groups that they use to drive peasants off land, which they then acquire cheaply.

The Colombian government has taken the unprecedented step of setting up official bodies entrusted with ensuring that basic rights are complied with. President Ernesto Samper himself has spoken out on the subject.

But in the view of Alirio Uribe, chairman of the Lawyers' Action Group, this just "goes to show that the situation is extremely worrying".

The group — which has been campaigning in Colombia for the past 20 years — says that the "impunity ratio" for crimes is particularly high: of 100 people murdered in Colombia every day, 10 are killed for political reasons. Every other day, one person goes missing. To date more than 750,000 people have had to leave their homes as a result of political violence.

(December 11)

Scandals dent Japan's ambitions

Philippe Pons in Tokyo

CAN Japan hope to play a major world role while it faces so much trouble at home? Shinji Sato, the minister of international trade and industry (Miti), was not present at the recent ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation in Singapore and it was an indication of the inertia that has overtaken a government bedevilled by a series of corruption scandals.

Japan expected to project its image as an honest broker between the industrialised world and the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. But Sato was detained in Tokyo, where he had to appear before the Japanese parliament to answer questions concerning the activities of about 100 senior civil servants in his ministry who were in the pay of a petroleum products company.

The practice of giving and receiving bribes is endemic in Japan. And scandals are breaking at a steady rate in spite of changes promised by the prime minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto. Reform of the administration is the goal he has set for this, his second, government.

The December 3 arrest of Nobuharu Okamitsu, administrative vice-minister of health, shows how high the corruption reaches. An administrative vice-minister is the highest-ranking civil servant in a ministry, and often performs the work of the minister.

The sad irony is that Okamitsu was appointed to his post with a specific remit to uncover further corruption in the health ministry relating to a HIV-infected blood scandal. The charge against Okamitsu is that he collected 60 million yen ($600,000) in pay-offs in return for granting state subsidies to companies competing to build homes for the elderly.

The five-year infrastructure programme for the elderly, which has a colossal budget of more than $90 million, was, in part, drafted under Okamitsu's guidance.

For building enterprises, badly affected by the crisis in the public works sector, this was manna from heaven. And they have rushed in, rewarding bureaucrats lavishly along the way.

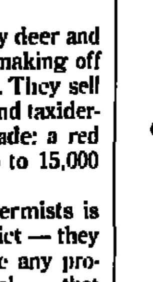
A few days before Okamitsu was detained, Shigeru Chatani, another senior health ministry civil servant, was arrested. On secondment from the central administration in the Saitama prefecture (outside Tokyo), between 1992 and 1995, Chitani handed out subsidies and building permits in proportion to the bribe received, while at the same time setting up a network of clients that enabled him to run for election to parliament on October 10. However, even with the prime minister's blessing, he failed to win a seat.

Until now, Hashimoto has managed to stay above the fray. But for how long? He inherited from his father, a former health minister, the lobby of businessmen and bureaucrats who hang around the ministry. This lobby, it is said, has the "highest esteem" for Okamitsu and approved his appointment as vice-minister of health.

(December 10)

Keeping wildlife in Paris under wraps

Véronique Maurus looks at the work of the capital's gamekeeper



IT IS a little-known fact that the Greater Paris area has its own gamekeeper — or, to be more accurate, its "national hunting and wildlife warden". Pierre, like his warden colleagues elsewhere in France, wears a green and sand-coloured uniform and a kepi, and the revolver in his holster is loaded.

He performs a wide range of tasks. He does his best to nab poachers who operate in the few pockets of woodland still left on the outskirts of the capital. He makes sure people do not take pot shots at protected species. He combats the illegal trade in animals on the endangered species list. He even inspects game sold by butchers.

National wardens used to be little more than an anti-poaching brigade controlled by the powerful hunters' federations. They have now become guardians of wildlife who work for the government and co-operate with police, customs and the veterinary and fire services. "They are the true police force of our national heritage," says Jean-Marie Ballu, head of the National Hunting Bureau (ONC), which employs the wardens.

Paul, who is Paris's fish warden, works hand in hand with Pierre. He wears the same uniform as Pierre, but does not carry a gun: anglers — even in Paris — are peaceful folk.

It is not Pierre's or Paul's job to play at being Rambo. The ONC has special units for that kind of thing. In the course of an incident involving helicopters and heavy exchanges of fire in October, they arrested a gang of poachers in the Pyrenees who had been shooting mountain goats with machine-guns.

Gone are the days when the poacher, immortalised by Maurice Genevoix's best-selling novel Raboliot (1925), would count his cartridges and kill only what he needed to eat. Today's poachers work in gangs, are highly trained and overequipped, and kill as many deer and boar as they can before making off in their four-wheel drives. They sell to butchers, restaurants and taxidermists. It is a lucrative trade: a red deer fetches anything up to 15,000 francs ($2,800).

Keeping tabs on taxidermists is difficult. The law is so strict — they are not allowed to handle any protected or poached animal — that fraud is widespread. "There are 400 officially registered taxidermists in France," says one of them, Michel Vaillier. "But the illegal trade is done only in underground workshops, of which there are believed to be 2,000-3,000."

With numbers like that, routine inspections are ineffective. But sometimes Pierre has a stroke of luck. Last year, his jaw dropped as he looked into the window of a specialised caterer: it was chock-a-block with stuffed animals — stoats, owls and other birds of prey — all of them protected species.

Sometimes he gets depressed about the public's ignorance of the law. For on top of the fraudsters, there are a lot of thoughtless people who satisfy their collecting urge by buying monkeys, parrots, mygales, and even panthers and anacondas, thus encouraging the international trade in such animals and sometimes endangering their own lives.

He and some veterinary officers recently swooped on a bistro where a bad-tempered chimpanzee was threatening customers. "That's when you see how stupid people can be," he says. "When you look at a chimp's teeth, you say to yourself that its owners must be mad: it could easily bite your head off."

There are thought to be 30,000 pet monkeys in Paris. The fire service has even set up a special "monkey unit". Someone recently spotted a crocodile having a swim in the Marne river. It is not known whether it survived the onset of winter.

Tracking down monkeys and crocodiles is not really part of Pierre's job. He intervenes in an advisory capacity, as well as preventively, in an attempt to flush out organised smugglers. The trade in rare animals is extremely lucrative. Certain brightly coloured macaws under threat of extinction can fetch up to 300,000 francs.



Smalltime smugglers flying in from South America regularly bring in parrots squeezed into cardboard canisters. Bigger fry transport animals through three or four countries so as to cover their tracks. According to international organisations, the smuggling of protected species is the third-largest illegal trade in the world after drugs and arms trafficking.

The mixing of genres is becoming increasingly common: "Reptiles are often used to transport diamonds or drugs," Pierre says. "A boa takes a week to digest a rabbit. The goods come out intact. We keep a very close eye on such animals. People are getting more and more cunning."

With the help of customs and the police, Pierre makes spot checks on all the middlemen suspected of supplying customers with such animals — pet shops, zoos, circuses, tamers, bogus breeders and so on.

It is a painstaking job. All owners of protected animals are required by law to have an entitlement certificate and to keep a record of purchases and sales. But even well-established pet shops often break the rules. Pierre recently checked out a supermarket specialising in pets and found some rare parrots next to the canaries. The store manager said she was about to get a certificate and did not keep a record of what she bought and sold. Pierre gave her the benefit of the doubt.

Paris and its suburbs also have their own population of wild animals — rabbits, foxes, weasels, starlings, magpies, crows, kestrels, wood-pigeons, mallard — which it is Pierre's job to protect and, often, prevent from causing damage. Most urbanised species are pests.

Rabbits, which tend to proliferate around airports, dig holes in lawns, destroy flowerbeds and ruin football pitches. Foxes can pass on rabies. Stone martens hide in lofts, where they destroy insulation, electrical wiring and alarm devices. "Stone martens are playful animals, and they love digging up flowers in cemeteries," he says.

PIERRE advises local councils on how to cope with the animal population. Sometimes he urges them to install wire netting, sometimes to call in one of Paris's 50 or so registered trappers. But he has no illusions. Overzealous animal lovers destroy traps that have been set to protect nestlings from predators. Councils are reluctant to be seen destroying pests because they fear an environmentalist backlash.

Recently, the St Denis council called Pierre in. A sick fox had been found hiding in a staircase. The council has no animal pound, and no one wanted to kill the animal, even though it was potentially dangerous. They left Pierre to deal with it.

Paul's problem is the giant catfish that fishermen have introduced into Lake Vincennes. Although very good to eat, such fish can grow to up to two metres in length and are carnivorous.

Was it true, as environmentalists have claimed, that giant catfish are not averse to the occasional duck or lap dog? "That's rubbish!" Paul said. "The ducks are dying from disease. It's not the catfish, but pollution." The local council recently released 42 ducks on to the lake to replace the ailing population. "Not mallard, surely?" asked Pierre. "I'm afraid so," Paul replied. "They're not allowed to — mallard is a wild species. But what can you do when the authorities themselves break the law?"

(December 5)

French regions at odds over the bear facts

Stéphane Thépot

THE Portet d'Aspet pass, situated in superb Pyrenean scenery at an altitude of 1,069m, marks the geographical dividing line between the *départements* of the Ariège and the Haute-Garonne.

It is also the point at which the local population's attitude to bears — once numerous in the region and now virtually extinct — changes radically: the Haute-Garonne side proudly proclaims itself to be "bear country" and favours their reintroduction, while inhabitants of the Ariège categorically reject the animal.

At the beginning of last summer, two she-bears captured in Slovenia were released in the mountains that form part of the commune of Melles, only a few kilometres as the crow flies from the Ariège.

The mayor of Melles had been waiting for this moment since 1993, when he signed a charter with the then environment minister, Michel Barnier, providing for the reintroduction of bears on two conditions: that the government would come up with aid for the economic development of the area, and that it would provide assurances that the bolstering of the bear population would impose no particular constraints on local inhabitants.

This approach was deliberately different from the one adopted by an earlier environment minister, Brice Lalonde, in the Béarn, a part of the Pyrenees farther to the west, and now the only area in France where a few bears still live in their natural state.

Lalonde's plan to set up special bear reserves that would to all intents and purposes be sanctuaries from which man was banned had the effect of polarising the hostility of hunters, sheep farmers and local councillors.

"You can't conduct an environmental policy against the people's will — you have to have them on your side," Barnier stressed when he came to Melles. Melles and three other small neighbouring communes in the Haute-Garonne that are sympathetic to this new approach have together formed an Association for Economic and Tourist Development (Adet).

But Slovenian bears do not read charters or recognise borders. After their release one of them, called Ziva, made a beeline for the Aran Valley in Spain, while the other, Melba, set up her main territory in the Ariège. Both animals turned their noses up at the feeding sites set up on Adet territory in the hope of encouraging them to settle there. The bears were more interested in the flocks of sheep that spend the summer grazing in the neighbouring mountains.

So far, the monitoring team has accepted that 17 attacks on sheep have taken place, resulting in the death of 40 animals. The grievances of angry shepherds have been passed on to the team by local councillors.

In September, the 26 communes forming the canton of Castillon-en-Couserans (Ariège) officially called for Melba to be recaptured and the reintroduction experiment to be halted.

Robert Zonch, the Socialist general councillor is outraged. "Melba is just a wretched illegal immigrant who has been abandoned by her 'family'," he says

André Rigoni, a biologist who heads Adet, points out that stray dogs and lightning cause much more damage to flocks every year than the newly arrived she-bear.

Rigoni, who was hired to monitor the bears, admits he now spends more time working on the problem of their "social acceptability" than on his scientific reports. But there are a number of farmers and councillors, particularly in the Haute-Garonne, who say they are prepared to support and take part in the experiment now under way.

There are advantages for farmers in the quite generous scheme to compensate for loss of livestock (about $250 per sheep killed) and in the various mountain-grazing subsidies available on Adet territory.

And councillors want to make sure their communes do not miss the boat if the "bear country" slogan turns out to have the effect of boosting tourism. The interest of Haute-Garonne councillors has increased now that an old plan for a "viewing park", which would enable thousands of visitors to look at bears *in situ*, has been resuscitated.

"It's a major project," says Rigoni enthusiastically. "It will enable people to see every species of bear in the world except for the polar bear and the panda."

Forty hectares have already been earmarked for the project near the small winter sports resort of Mourtis.

Is an economic miracle on the cards? "Lourdes took off because of the Virgin Mary; we've got our bears," says Rigoni. He has to admit, though, that tourists have not exactly taken his village by storm. The local sheep-farmer, who sells ewe's-milk cheeses called "Pays de l'Ours" (Bear Country), grumbles that there was not even the tiniest upturn in his cheese sales last summer.

(December 3)

Nigeria's Rulers Mix Oil and Money

The military leaders are using a potent formula to keep sanctions at bay, writes **Glenn Frankel**

WHEN NIGERIA'S military government hanged the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other political activists in November 1995, world leaders such as Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela reacted with shock, anger and the promise of punitive measures. But the campaign for severe sanctions never got off the ground — thanks in large part to an aggressive lobbying effort spearheaded by the Nigerian government and the oil companies that have a major financial stake in the African country.

Nigeria's lobbying success is a textbook example of how even the most unpopular of foreign regimes can neutralize their opposition in Washington with money and influential friends. It also illustrates the Clinton administration's lack of resolve when it comes to Africa. Rather than take the lead, the administration sought a consensus with countries in Europe and Africa for harsh measures against Nigeria. When that effort failed, it allowed the fate of the world's largest black-ruled nation to slip silently from its agenda. "The very aggressive rhetoric of a year ago ended up basically as just hot air," said Janet Fleischman, Washington director of Human Rights Watch/Africa.

Nigeria is at once both Africa's most promising country and one of its most troubled. The world's ninth largest oil producer — it supplies about 600,000 barrels a day to the United States, 8 percent of total US oil imports — Nigeria remains burdened by ethnic, geographic and religious conflicts and has spent most of its 35 years of independence under military rule.

Gen. Sani Abacha became the latest of a long line of Nigerian military masters in 1993 when he annulled the presidential election that was supposed to restore civilian rule and imprisoned the apparent winner, Moshood Abiola, along with hundreds of supporters.

Abacha's regime has staged its harshest crackdown in Ogoniland in southeastern Nigeria, home of some of the country's richest oilfields. Saro-Wiwa's dissident movement began as a protest against the poverty of Ogoniland and environmental degradation there, and demanded a share of oil revenues for the region. The government saw the movement as a secessionist threat. A military tribunal convicted Saro-Wiwa and his backers of inciting the murder of four pro-government tribal leaders, and sentenced them to death without appeal to civilian courts. Royal Dutch Shell, which has been criticized by human rights advocates and environmentalists for allegedly colluding with the regime in repressing local protests and despoiling the region, declined to intercede on Saro-Wiwa's behalf, and then made a plea at the last possible minute.

After the hangings, a coalition of American human rights, environmental, black and labor groups launched a campaign for strong sanctions. One of its leaders, Randall Robinson, president of the lobbying group TransAfrica, organized a letter to President Clinton signed by 54 prominent American blacks — including Bill Cosby, Jesse Jackson, Coretta Scott King and 28 members of Congress — calling for tough measures against the Abacha regime.



A demonstration in support of Ken Saro-Wiwa outside the Nigerian embassy in London
PHOTOGRAPH GRAHAM TURNER

Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kansas) and Rep. Donald M. Payne (D-New Jersey) introduced companion bills in the Senate and House that would have cut off most new US investment in Nigeria and laid the groundwork for an international oil embargo.

At the same time, the Clinton administration announced a set of mild sanctions, including a ban on sales of military equipment, a reduction in humanitarian aid, a recall of the US ambassador and a broadening of an existing ban on visas for Nigerian officials and their families. Then, after an initial high-level review, State Department officials said they would take further steps in collaboration with European and African states, and did not exclude an embargo on Nigerian oil sales. Nigeria receives more than $10 billion a year from oil, accounting for 90 percent of its foreign export earnings and 80 percent of government revenues, and an international embargo would have caused immediate economic pain.

Nigeria fought back. The Lagos government employed the services of nine US public relations and lobbying firms spanning the American political spectrum. Among them were the law firm of Washington & Christian, run by liberal black Democrats, which reported receiving $600,000 from Nigeria for the first six months of the year, and Symms, Lehn & Associates, an Alexandria firm headed by former Idaho senator Steve Symms (R) and Alfred Lehn, former aide to Bob Dole, which reported receiving about $300,000. Based on disclosure reports and other information, Nigeria's critics have estimated that the regime has spent more than $10 million in the United States on lobbying and public relations efforts since the hanging.

ONE of Nigeria's most effective representatives was Maurice Dawkins, a former Republican senatorial candidate in Virginia and an associate of Symms, Lehn. He recruited prominent American blacks, such as newspaper publishers and clergymen, for fact-finding trips to Nigeria paid for by the military government, which also ran eight-page, full-color advertising supplements in a dozen or more black-owned newspapers in the United States.

Carol Moseley-Braun (D-Illinois), the Senate's lone black member, and Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan returned from their own trips to Nigeria urging American blacks and the Clinton administration to give the Nigerian government a chance to enact democratic reforms.

Robinson, a longtime opponent of military rule in Nigeria, argued that American blacks who had demanded US sanctions against white-ruled South Africa in the 1980s could not ignore repression when practiced by black rulers in Africa. But he says he knew from the beginning that sanctions against Nigeria would be a hard sell because the regime had lots of oil money. Even before the hangings, he says, he was approached by a Nigerian businessman with close ties to the government who offered him up to $1 million to drop his criticism of the regime. Robinson rejected the offer.

"Oil money makes a huge difference because it puts spunk in the spine of your enemy," he said. Testimony against the sanctions bill before a Senate subcommittee by Moseley-Braun and Rep. William J. Jefferson (D-Louisiana) helped create the impression that the Congressional Black Caucus was divided on the issue, according to a Senate staff member who worked on the bill. This made it easy for other lawmakers to beg off. But he said a bigger factor was the lobbying effort by major oil companies such as Mobil Oil, Amoco and Chevron, as well as several non-oil firms with involvement in a $3.8 billion liquefied natural gas project in southeast Nigeria.

One of the key lobbying groups was the 107-member Corporate Council on Africa, a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting Africa's economic development and business relationships between African countries and US corporations. The council, which reported receiving $10,000 each from Conoco and Chevron to lobby on the issue, argued to lawmakers and administration officials that dialogue rather than confrontation was more likely to produce political reforms in Nigeria. "We honestly don't believe a unilateral oil embargo against Nigeria would accomplish much except to further concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a few," said David H. Miller, the council's executive director. "It's a great press release but it would be counterproductive."

The lobbying effort effectively killed the Kassebaum-Payne bills, which were never even voted on in their respective legislative committees. Meanwhile, the Clinton administration was also spinning its wheels. Advocates for further sanctions — including then National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, John Shattuck, the assistant secretary of state for human rights, and Timothy Wirth, undersecretary of state for global affairs — pressed for tougher measures. They were opposed by representatives from the Department of Commerce and other economics-oriented Cabinet agencies, who argued that unilateral sanctions would only succeed in pushing up the price of heating oil for Americans.

Among the documents they cited was a report from the Petroleum Industry Research Foundation in New York that an oil embargo would disproportionately affect New England, a region that is a major customer for clean-burning Nigerian "sweet" crude used in heating oil.

Pointing to the example of Iraq, opponents within the administration also said sanctions would likely hurt average Nigerians while leaving the country's rulers unscathed — and could lead to retaliation against American companies doing business in Nigeria. Before his trip to Africa in October, then Secretary of State Warren Christopher told a breakfast meeting of representatives of non-governmental organizations that he was "very uncomfortable" with the administration's Nigeria policy, according to two participants. But Robinson and other critics said Christopher himself had appeared disengaged from the issue.

The administration opted instead for more consultations with its allies. President Clinton wrote to European leaders last March, proposing a series of steps — such as freezing Nigerian assets in their countries — designed to pinch the country's rulers without damaging its economy. But US officials say the leaders of Britain, Germany and France — home to several large oil companies with major stakes in Nigeria — were lukewarm at best. Mandela, the South African president who had helped engineer Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations within days of the hangings, backed off after the United States failed to respond to his public call for more severe sanctions. "The US wanted cover from Mandela and he wanted cover from us," said one US diplomat. "It just didn't work out."

BECAUSE of its size and wealth, Nigeria dominates the Organization of African Unity and contributes a major portion of the peace-keeping force in war-torn Liberia, and other African states are reluctant to challenge the regime. When Christopher raised the subject of sanctions with Mandela and other African leaders during his Africa trip, he got a cold response.

With the first anniversary of the hangings, human rights activists relaunched their campaign with demonstrations and renewed calls for an oil embargo against Nigeria and a boycott of Shell, which is the biggest and most influential of the foreign companies operating there. Relatives of Saro-Wiwa and another of the victims have filed suit against Shell in federal court in New York alleging the company collaborated with the regime in human rights and environmental abuses, allegations the company has denied.

The Nigerian government has released some political prisoners and held local elections in an attempt to show it is moving toward a return to civilian democracy in 1998. But Abiola and many of his supporters remain in detention and Kudirat Abiola, who had pressed publicly for her husband's release, was killed in June on the streets of Lagos by unknown gunmen. The government used the killing as justification for the arrest of two dozen family members and supporters.

Administration officials say they have not ruled out further sanctions against Nigeria, and they believe the Lagos regime is acting cautiously because it knows its behavior is under scrutiny. But a new test looms.

Nineteen more of Saro-Wiwa's followers still face trial for the same charges that led to his execution. Will the threat of sanctions stay the hangman? Or will the regime calculate that the Clinton administration and the West will again opt for sweeping declarations of condemnation — and no action?

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Military Goes to War on Narcotics

The use of troops to counter smugglers reflects the Pentagon's growing involvement in law enforcement duties, writes **Jim McGee** in Fort Bliss, Texas

THROUGH night-vision goggles, the drug smugglers resembled a pack team in an old Western movie: three riders and nine horses, winding single file down a rugged ravine in the Coronado National Forest near Nogales, Arizona.

U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers, watching the remote mountain pass from two camouflaged observation posts in the trees, waited until the procession had sauntered past before issuing an alert over a secure radio channel.

At Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, a U.S. Forest Service officer sitting in the base command center jotted down the Green Berets' information and relayed it to a National Guard OH-58 helicopter crew, which took off for the ravine.

Using an infrared radar system and map coordinates provided by the Army, the helicopter crew soon spotted the horses and riders. Within minutes, a posse of sheriff's deputies and Forest Service officials driving Ford Broncos had arrested the smugglers and seized their booty: 2,404 pounds of cocaine.

The Coronado Forest episode, which occurred last year, may have had more dramatic sweep than most drug busts. But the case was typical in illuminating the extent to which the U.S. military has become embedded in the nation's drug war, as the Pentagon increasingly is drawn into domestic police missions long considered the province of civilian law enforcement agencies.

With little public fanfare and scant congressional scrutiny, the military's domestic role has become broad and deep. Since 1989, when Congress and the Bush administration formally ordered the military into the drug fight, the Pentagon has spent more than $7 billion on counter-drug operations. Last year, more than 8,000 active duty and reserve soldiers, sailors and Air Force personnel, — a force almost equivalent to an infantry division — participated in 754 counter-drug support missions on U.S. soil that led to 1,894 arrests.

Special Forces teams monitor the Rio Grande, Marines patrol the California desert and Army intelligence officers watch for criminal activity from investigative centers in Miami, New York, Los Angeles, Houston and Greenbelt, Maryland.

The Army squad that spotted the smugglers in Arizona was part of Joint Task Force Six (JTF-6), the Defense Department headquarters that links the nation's military forces with domestic law enforcement agencies. In promoting a partnership between military and civilian forces, JTF-6 circulates to police departments a 55-page "Operational Support Planning Guide" marketing the use of Green Beret units, Navy SEAL teams and Marine reconnaissance patrols.

Many supporters of the military's involvement in drug enforcement, citing the threat to the nation's social and economic order, believe the Pentagon's role should be even greater. "I think it should be getting larger," said Rep. Bill Zeliff, R-New Hampshire, chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight national security, international affairs and criminal justice subcommittee.

For some military commanders, counter-drug operations provide useful training while making soldiers feel that they're involved in a vital mission. Civilian law enforcement officials are generally grateful for the technological acumen and professional competence the armed forces provide, particularly with sophisticated surveillance and communications systems.

The billions spent mustering the military for anti-drug duty has yielded an uncertain dividend. The availability of cocaine, heroin and marijuana in U.S. cities has not decreased, according to federal drug officials. And critics contend the military has edged toward a legal threshold that has been a singular feature of U.S. civil-military relations for more than a century: a general ban on military involvement in routine domestic law enforcement.

"There is a very strong claim that we are already pressing the outer bounds of what is constitutionally desirable," said James X. Dempsey of the Center for National Security Studies in Washington.

Even an ardent drug warrior like McCaffrey expresses wariness about overstepping a legal tradition that has its roots in the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878. The statute was a response to post-Civil War abuses by occupation troops in the South during Reconstruction. The law prohibits Army involvement in domestic arrests or searches and seizures, a ban since extended to the other services.



US Customs officers are working alongside the National Guard to fight cocaine trafficking PHOTOGRAPH: RICK BOWMER

Military units are involved, however. Active duty forces are complemented by thousands of National Guard troops, who have become the hidden support strut inside federal law enforcement. Unless called to federal duty, the National Guard is not covered by Posse Comitatus and has more latitude in undertaking law enforcement missions.

The Guard inspects cargo for U.S. Customs, analyzes intelligence for the FBI and translates wiretap intercepts for the Drug Enforcement Administration. The Guard now has more personnel assigned to counter-drug activities than the DEA has special agents on duty, according to Col. David Friestad, the Guard's counter-drug coordinator.

Lawrence J. Korb, an assistant secretary of defense during the Reagan administration, argues that the open-ended nature of the military's commitment is the greatest potential hazard. "It should [have been] a temporary stopgap," Korb said, "but it's been institutionalized."

Moreover, there is new pressure to extend the military's domestic role to counter-terrorism. During the Olympics last summer, a Marine Corps chemical, biological and nuclear warfare response team was deployed to Atlanta. FBI Director Louis J. Freeh recently urged Congress "to take that infrastructure, which was specific to the Olympics, and expand it into a much larger framework." Congress appropriated $350 million for the Defense Department to begin training state and local authorities against such threats.

Even early enthusiasts for a vigorous military role in the drug war, such as Jon R. Thomas, former assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters, are uneasy about the drift.

"Where does it stop?" Thomas said. "Posse Comitatus was a real smart idea. It was basically saying, look, we don't want the military with police power."

How Drugs Sucked In The Army

FOR MORE than 20 years, enthusiasm for flinging the military into the drug war has ebbed and flowed in Washington, *writes Jim McGee*. In the late 1970s, the Carter administration provided military assistance to source countries, such as Mexico, to help eradicate marijuana fields, but left in place strict prohibitions against more overt military involvement.

President Ronald Reagan, faced with a burgeoning cocaine trade, first mustered the Pentagon for the drug war in 1981 by declaring international drug trafficking a threat to national security and assigning his vice president, George Bush, to head a drug task force that advocated extensive use of military assets.

The military's role grew slowly, however, constrained by the Pentagon's discomfort with the new mission and modest funding from Congress.

But in 1989 the concept gained new traction. President Bush ordered the Pentagon to participate vigorously in the drug war and Congress more than doubled the Defense Department's counter-drug appropriation, from $200 million in 1988 to $438 million in 1989. For fiscal 1997, Congress appropriated $947 million, a 16 percent increase over the previous year.

Initially, the Pentagon favored a massive deployment of radar ships and Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) planes to set up a virtual blockade in the Gulf of Mexico. The operation led to some large seizures, but proved expensive and had little impact on the availability of cocaine in U.S. cities.

Concluding that such massive interdiction was fruitless, President Clinton ordered a shift of military counter-drug assets from transit lanes to source countries.

This approach fostered a new network of interagency task forces, such as the one occupying a new $13.5 million command center in Key West, Florida, which put military officers in seats next to federal agents. The modified strategy has resulted in thousands of pilots, soldiers and military commanders cross-training in a civilian law enforcement specialty that is increasingly viewed as a permanent part of the Pentagon's job.

Such integration has occurred on a scale both small and large. In Utah, 125 soldiers work to translate telephone conversations garnered by DEA eavesdropping, often on Colombian, Mexican or Nigerian suspects. And at the investigative center in Greenbelt, Maryland, military intelligence officers assemble files on drug gangs in Baltimore and analyze financial transactions by suspects in Fairfax County.

"Once the military was told by the Congress and the president that this was part of their mission," James X. Dempsey said, "then they were institutionally bound to make it permanent and pervasive."

Worldwide Heroin Production Soars

William Branigin

FUELED by expanding drug trafficking rings and ineffectual or corrupt governments, the world's production of opium has risen dramatically in recent years and is pushing up addiction rates for heroin, according to the U.S. drug policy chief.

Barry R. McCaffrey, a retired general who heads the White House Office of Drug Control Policy, recently expressed alarm about the increases after returning from a trip to Southeast Asia that overlapped President Clinton's visit to Thailand. McCaffrey visited the "Golden Triangle," which spans the borders of Burma, Thailand and Laos and produces most of the world's opium, the narcotic from which heroin is derived.

Global opium production has doubled since 1988 and is now about 4,000 metric tons a year, according to estimates compiled by the CIA and cited by McCaffrey. It takes about 10 tons of opium to make one ton of heroin, drug experts say.

"This massive commodity production is looking for a marketplace," and its greatest impact is likely to be in the regions where opium poppies are grown, McCaffrey said. He said drug trafficking and addiction are up sharply in China, notably near the Golden Triangle, and in Pakistan, which borders the world's second-largest opium producer, Afghanistan.

At the same time, international drug trafficking organizations — among them Nigerian, Chinese, Colombian and Mexican rings — are "aggressively" marketing heroin in the United States and Europe. As cocaine use has fallen in the United States in recent years, Colombian gangs in particular have sought to peddle heroin to try to keep their share of the U.S. narcotics market.

The United States currently has about 600,000 addicts, only 2 percent of the world's total, but "we're seeing some disturbing trends among young people," McCaffrey said.

Opium production in Colombia has risen from virtually nothing a few years ago to 65 metric tons last year, surpassing Mexico, according to the CIA figures. Together, the two countries now produce more than enough heroin to meet current U.S. demand of about 10 metric tons a year, McCaffrey said.

Still, the output from Latin America is dwarfed by that from Southeast Asia, which produces 60 percent of the world's opium. Of that, the CIA figures show, 92 percent comes from Burma, the world's biggest producer. Based largely on satellite reconnaissance of the areas under cultivation, agency estimates put Burma's 1996 opium production at 2,560 metric tons and rising.

The increase in Burmese opium production in recent years coincides with the takeover in Burma of the State Law and Order Restoration Council, a military junta known as SLORC.

"The jury is still out on how much SLORC is involved in drug production," McCaffrey said. "But we can say that the drug production is up, not down." He said the junta's "dismal" human rights record is an obstacle to U.S. cooperation in trying to reduce opium cultivation, which is carried out largely by hill tribes in remote parts of the country.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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New Horizons for Cold War Warrior

Critics who wrote off John Le Carré after the fall of communism have found the master plotter is still one step ahead, writes **David Streitfeld**

A FEW years ago, a fan sent John le Carré a gift. It was a paperback copy of his most famous novel, The Spy Who Came In From The Cold. This would have been a pointless exercise, but stamped inside was the original owner's name: Aldrich Ames.

The novelist kept the book, although with mixed feelings. "I found it a little bit dirty, a bit creepy," he says. "Like having someone break into your bedroom."

The most notorious American spy since the Rosenbergs was, it seems, a big fan of England's most famous spy novelist. Ames's library, sold after his arrest, included the writer's Smiley trilogy, which is about the pursuit of deep-penetration agents known as moles. A mole, of course, is exactly what Ames so devastatingly was.

The conventional view of Ames is that he betrayed the CIA and sent men to their deaths for money. But le Carré believes that, in the end, "as traitors and some criminals do, Ames was having a dialogue with God. 'If I do this, will I be caught? Do you still love me if I do that?' "

Ames blatantly broke all the rules of discretion, putting down a half-million in cash for a mortgage, buying a $50,000 white Jaguar and so on. "That was really an invitation to his maker to lose patience. He knew the stuff. He knew how they find people." He knew from his le Carré, if nothing else.

But if Ames misread le Carré, so did the critics who tried in the early '90s to put the novelist on the shelf, saying that the end of the Cold War made him as relevant as a writer about pirates. Instead, le Carré nimbly shifted gears, secretly glad to have a new topic.

His last three books are set in places like the Caribbean or the Caucasus — border regions that offer "a theater for the real future conflict, which is going on all the time. Our own Western perestroika hasn't even begun.

"The mere fact that communism didn't work doesn't mean that capitalism does. In many parts of the globe it's a wrecking, terrible force, displacing people, ruining lifestyles, traditions, ecologies and stable systems with the same ruthlessness as communism."

He apologizes for "ranting," but this really isn't the right term. In le Carré's new novel, The Tailor Of Panama, his hero, Harry Pendel, has a gift for "fluence": the ability to talk impulsively and eloquently, making his theories, arguments and suspicions believable to everyone. Not least himself.

For le Carré, fluence has provided wealth and fame. Harry Pendel isn't nearly so fortunate, and in his comic downfall is a trace of there-but-for-the-grace-of-God. The novelist confesses: "I'm punishing myself."

David Cornwell adopted the name John le Carré so long ago he now says he can no longer recall why he chose it. He has come to this swank room in the Carlyle Hotel, New York, grudgingly, as he always does. He hates interviews, hates hearing himself talk about himself, hates giving up an air of mystery. "This is positively my last appearance," he says. He has said this before.

The odd thing is, he's so good at talking, particularly in public. It's the fluence. Two nights before at the 92nd Street Y, he was in adequate form, which is to say as good as anyone in the novel-writing business. Last year in San Francisco he was superb. Ditto North Carolina in '92. Proof of his verbal talents can be found on the many audiotapes he has made of his work: They're done so skillfully that you aren't aware of the narration, just of the story. This is the way fiction should be, and rarely is.

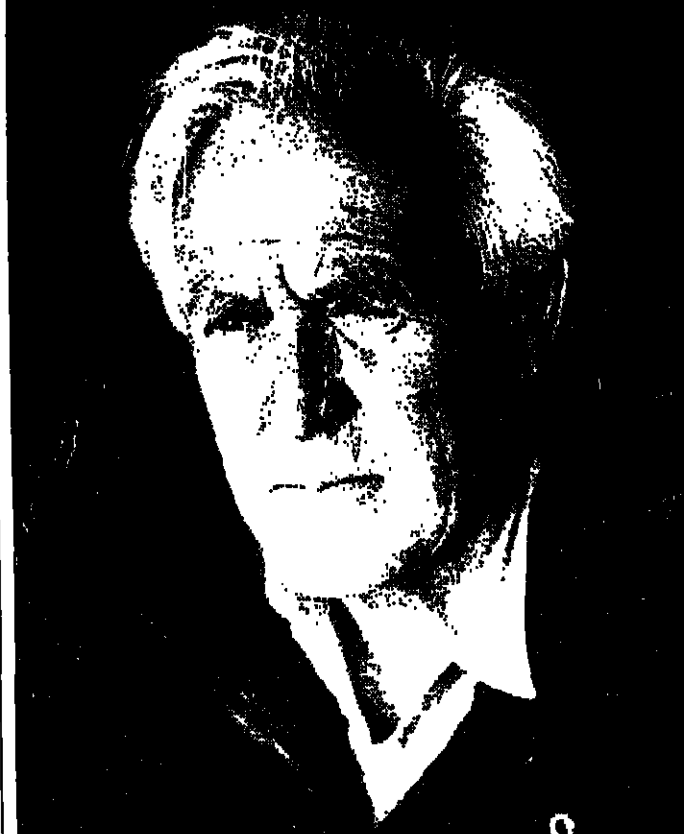
He says he is not the life of the party, despite reports to the contrary. Downright dull, he claims. Being entertaining in person would take energy away from being entertaining in print and, at age 65 with maybe a decade of novel-writing left, who would want that? "I go to bed at 9 o'clock. I don't give the fluence away."

In The Tailor Of Panama, Harry Pendel does just that, if rather unwillingly. Harry is recruited as a spy for the British. "We're reopening Panama," he's told. The canal, due to be surrendered by the United States on December 31, 1999, is up for grabs. Where there's intrigue, there's a need for information. And in a small country like Panama, one very expensive tailor can get confided in a lot. A wife who works for a high official in the Canal Commission is a bonus. Harry does come up with some great information, mainly by cooking minor facts into elaborate confections. The Japanese want the canal. The revolutionaries are stirring. Certain officials are secretly corrupt. Harry's controller is thrilled by this bonanza. So are the controller's bosses, who add their own spin. In short, this is a novel about self-deceit.

It happens all the time in the intelligence business. "I would love to know what the CIA has spent on fabricated information," le Carré says. "Over the last 25 years, it must be half the national debt."

The fibbing and faking are getting worse. "As the systems for propagating information and speeding it around the globe are becoming ever more sophisticated, so do the opportunities to manipulate information." Le Carré pauses to decry what he variously terms "political correctness or sound bites or family values," the notion "of only one correct attitude to any one problem." He means things like the U.S. invasions of Panama and Grenada, the Persian Gulf War. "The manipulation of truth seems to go hand-in-hand with the availability of information."

In Tailor the corruption, the misstatements and distortion go all the way up the government and journalistic ladders. "Everyone is using truth as his whore," getting it to do whatever he wants. This is a novel that uses comedy to make the tragedy more palatable.



Le Carré . . . created the modern concept of the secret agent

"Corruption," he believes, "really can destroy to this extent. One reason why we think that life is good in America is that most of people who are describing life, the articulate people, are on the gravy end. The people who can't speak for themselves, the inarticulate who grow in numbers every day, have no proper spokespeople."

There's a break in le Carré's work after Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy, his seventh novel, published in 1974. All the books until then had been set in Europe, a setting he had grown weary of. "I decided I was sitting on my ass too much. I selected education spots." Southeast Asia was first; he saw the endgame in Vietnam. "I became, shamefully or otherwise, a war tourist of a sort." The result was The Honourable Schoolboy, one of his best books.

After the Cold War, there were two epilogues, The Russia House and The Secret Pilgrim. But then, in The Night Manager, he turned to the arms and narcotics trades. In Our Game it was the fragmentation of the former Soviet empire. Now Panama, a place that has slipped below American radar even though no one knows what will result when the canal is turned over. Le Carré's publisher hoped that the canal would become a late-blooming issue in the presidential campaign, but no such luck. Maybe the Republicans will get their game together in time for the paperback.

Le Carré made five visits to the country, each of two to three weeks. He would meet someone who would introduce him to someone who would introduce him to someone else. Soon he ended up knowing what his characters knew and seeing all they saw. This sort of hands-on research is vital for le Carré; he speaks of pretending he is one of his characters. The fluence comes naturally, but not without work.

In the novel, the most sympathetic characters are the Panamanians. Le Carré's recent article in the New York Times Magazine, "Quel Panama!," had a bit more of an edge, including lines like "Everybody knows that in Panama even the best of men find it hard to get rich without a little white powder sticking to their fingers."

The new Panamanian ambassador to the United States, who became a friend of le Carré's during the novelist's Panamanian visits, felt he had to protest. In a letter to the magazine, Eduardo Morgan gently tweaked the writer: "I am aware that novelists live in a world beyond reality. For that reason I am not surprised to learn in this case his keen sense for 'cloak and dagger' ambiance should spill over from his fiction to his perception of facts."

MOST novelists borrow from the real world to create their imaginary landscapes. A lucky few find that the world returns the favor, taking the writer's concepts or phrases and introducing them to common usage. Vladimir Nabokov coined the term "nymphet" and gave a certain spin to the name Lolita, and now they're both stock expressions for a certain type of girl. Mario Puzo made the Mafia glamorous; without Puzo, John Gotti would have just been a run-of-the-mill hood.

Le Carré created the modern concept of the secret agent: rumpled, besieged by trouble and betrayal, yet secretly powerful. "He changed the image of the spy from a glamorous figure to a bureaucrat, which is closer to the truth," says David Wise, who has written widely on espionage. "The CIA is a bureaucracy. One reason it took so long to catch Ames was precisely for bureaucratic reasons. You're reluctant to suspect someone who is a member of the club."

The novelist has gotten a good return out of what he calls "my little university," his seven or eight years as a spy himself during the late '50s and early '60s. It's been an infinitely adaptable setting. The only one of his 14 novels not to use the secret world as a backdrop was The Naive And Sentimental Lover in 1971. A fictional rendering of an intense emotional relationship le Carré had with another couple — the novelist James Kennaway and his wife, Susan — that novel was merely the writer spying on his own life.

For years, the novelist has protested that he doesn't know much about the real world of spies, and for years no one has believed him. The spell cast by the novels is so effective that in the early 1990s East German spymaster Markus Wolf was repeatedly identified in news accounts as le Carré's model for the Soviet spy chief Karla. Le Carré says he hadn't even heard of Wolf when he invented Karla, and rejects the German's latter-day attempts to whitewash his actions, calling him "the modern equivalent of Albert Speer . . . a nasty little twerp." Still, the myth persists.

"Of course, it's fun in a way to have one's fantasies taken for real," he says. Only in a way, though. "There is a kind of guilt in me which my character Harry ought to be feeling. It's a feeling that has perennially haunted writers — the sinfulness, the corrosive eye that the writer brings to stuff. Graham Greene talked about the chip of ice." Greene, le Carré's only competition for the title of best spy writer of the century, weighs on the younger man's mind these days. The Tailor Of Panama is an acknowledged homage to the late master's Our Man In Havana. Le Carré is now moving into the age when Greene wrote his lesser books. He has mentioned before that it would have been a good idea if someone had told Greene not to publish a few of those. Le Carré vows, "I will not end up as an old man struggling to keep up his literary reputation." When the fluence is gone, he says, he's sure to know.

His father had an abundant supply to the end. He was always promoting nonexistent deals, which landed him in the slammer more than once. The writer's mother fled early, with a real estate agent who was himself married. She didn't take the two boys because she feared her husband would then come after her.

Recipe for a horrible childhood: "Boarding school, holiday school, foster parents, proxy mothers for a holiday or a few weeks at a time, constant changing of women until he married one stepmother, then another stepmother. Masses of women running concurrently and consecutively."

It's surprising he didn't fly apart, become a spy only to become a traitor. "There could have been a time when, properly spoken to, I could have been seduced into rebellion," he tells the audience at the Y.

Instead of anger, le Carré was driven by an eagerness to please. "I became an entertainer. 'Go on, David, tell the one about so-and-so,' I loved to imitate people."

But if this was the birth of the fluence, it also was the origin of his ambivalence. "Being a novelist means training your brain to work a certain way; after a time it can't be helped, or stopped. He mentions the French term for it: *déformation professionelle*. It sounds like a disease, an inherited one perhaps.

'The mere fact that communism didn't work doesn't mean that capitalism does. In many parts of the globe it's a wrecking, terrible force'

Virtual understanding

British and Australian schools are to trade world views on the Internet, writes **David O'Reilly**

A PLAN to use the Internet to try to reforge cultural links with Australia may have big spin-off benefits for British schools. As part of a campaign called New Images, the whole of 1997 is being set aside for a two-way exchange of cultural activities between Britain and Australia, involving everyone from poets to astronomers.

New Images was devised by the British Council after former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd grew concerned during a visit to Australia in the early 1990s that views of Britain were locked into stereotypes about Beefeaters and historic buildings.

British and Australian officials decided to try to showcase each country to the other as contemporary, innovative and hi-tech places. The Internet is to play a key role in the campaign, which will begin with a satellite-linked launch in February.

Children in hundreds of schools in both countries are to be given the chance to work up collaborations via the Internet. Already there is a plan for primary school children in London to link with schools in Brisbane to create drawings and stories about each other. Schools in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire will link with high school children in outback Northern Queensland to create a "virtual tour" of their local areas, and schools in Northern Ireland are planning similar tie-ups with some in Western Australia.

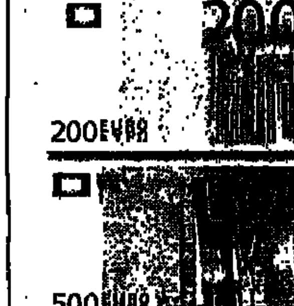
The finished projects will be published on the Net during 1997 as prototypes for other schools to adapt.

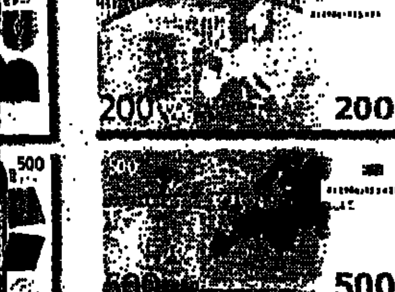
Thousands of Web surfers in both countries will be asked to contribute to an opinion poll designed to collect up-to-date information about the attitudes of each country to the other. The survey will be posted on the Web in January, allowing the British Council to draw off data over the next few years to determine the impact of the New Images programme.

"There are some cleverly open-ended questions and the themes are across the board, from things like Britain's trading relations to where people look for style," says David Blagerough, British Council head of business relations. "What does the weather do to people's state of mind? What would living in the other country be like? The survey will ask people to discuss propositions like: all Australian men are macho, all British men are wimps. There will be an attempt to plug into humour about one another, classic British/Australian jokes.

"We make assumptions about the perceptions. Our assumption is that people in Australia think of Britain as being regal theme parks and cream teas and the crown jewels. And likewise here, there is an assumption that Australia is Neighbours, Dame Edna and beaches. Those are the assumptions and they may well be untrue. But if they are, New Images is about trying to change them", Mr Blagerough said.

The survey could also become the prototype for ventures to test cultural ties elsewhere in the world.





Some of the euro notes unveiled in Dublin this month

A pocket full of euros

CITY OF WORDS
John Ryle

THE NAME has no mojo; the designs for the notes are nondescript. Yet I'm sure we'll all get used to the aura of the euro. We coped with decimalisation, with the loss of shillings and pence, of farthings and florins, of guineas and groats. So why not the pound sterling? We may even find some novel use for that keyboard curiosity, the £ symbol. Recollect that the curly L denotes, by origin, the first unit of an old imperial currency, the *librae*, *soldi* and *denarii* of ancient Rome: this is not the first time Britain's money supply has been controlled from outside the country.

Perhaps it would have been a better idea to draw on these Latin terms in the search for a new European currency, rather than lopping a syllable off the name of Zeus's paramour. Or, if euros they must be, to give them mythological weight with an engraving of Europa's abduction by Zeus, rather than the dull maps and bridges on the published design. (The French are good at this: their bank notes are the prettiest there are. If the Germans must run the fiscal side, let the French do the design.) But it's too late now. As with so much else in the European Union, the decisions seem to have been taken without any public discussion. The euro it is, at least until someone invents a nickname for it. (Suggestions on a bank note, please, of any denomination.)

As I say, euros are something I could get used to — if I had enough of them. And it seems that the European Monetary Institute expects us to be rich: the lowest denomination unveiled at the Dublin summit earlier this month was a five-euro note, while the highest was 500, which is likely to be the equivalent of between £300 and £400 — more money than most people see in a week.

The euro, we are told, will save us from inflation, because German bankers hate inflation more than anything. And it's true that the most important thing about a currency is that it should keep its value. Those who have lived in countries suffering from hyperinflation know the heart-sinking feeling of waking up and realising what you have is worth 5 per cent less than it was yesterday: savings dwindle to nothing; dreams turn to ashes. The last country in Europe to experience such freefall was Germany in the twenties. It's no wonder the Bundesbank is obsessed with keeping inflation down.

When I was in Uganda a few years ago, the local shilling had been reduced to a value of less than one-100th of a US cent. If you wanted to know how much money you had, you weighed it. On a journey to the north of the country I travelled with several kilograms of Ugandan shillings to buy fuel and food: 1,000-shilling notes in bundles of 500 packed in an attaché-case, like the proceeds of a drug deal.

In northern Uganda, an area suffering severely from the privations of civil war, I found myself discussing inflation with a farmer. I had heard it was like this in Germany in the twenties, I said: money was worth so little that housewives went to market with wheelbarrows full of banknotes in order to buy bread. He thought about this a bit. Then he said, "And where did they get the wheelbarrows?" Another Ugandan told me that he had been trying to buy a car, but couldn't carry the money. He had to hire a taxi to carry the cash from the bank to the vendor's place. It took them all day to count it.

But the euro is hard currency and the Ugandan shilling is soft. In the end, what matters is whether your money is convertible or not. The shilling is local; it belongs, at best in the national bank, but the euro belongs with dollars and yen, beyond state borders, in the lucrosphere.

The rich delta beneath the burning Kalahari sun is a threatened paradise for animal and plant life PHOTOGRAPH: ERIC ROBERT AND SYLVIE BERGEROT

African garden of Eden on edge of disaster

Ruaridh Nicoll in Botswana finds the 'great oasis' of the Okavango is in peril of drying up to satisfy human needs

PUSHING gently at the stream's sandy floor, Worm eases his canoe through the thick reeds that border the banks of the Boro. He stops to point to a distant line of trees that used to mark the banks of a great river and then, as if to prove a point, he knocks past a wrecked canoe that has become wedged across the channel's new breadth.

The sweltering silence is broken by an elephant, a little to the left, which rips at branches, feeding itself lethargically with its trunk.

Downriver, the water ends in a large pool where hippos congregate. Worm treats the place with respect; he believes a huge snake lives in its depths drinking the river dry. Around about, the land lies lazily like pottery glazing in a kiln, creatures emerging and departing on hazy, washed-out backgrounds. Overhead the Kalahari sun burns deep, claiming the once great waters of the Okavango back for itself. Quietly poling, Worm says that he has never seen the water so low; that he fears for his job.

Eighty or so kilometres to the south, Dr Karen Ross, holding her straw hat down against the grey dust wind, leaves her office. She has just seen a letter published in one of Botswana's national newspapers accusing her of spreading "the sort of careless propaganda that may encourage green activists to take up arms, go ballistic or even ignite the water bomb waiting to explode on [Botswana's] northern border". Ross, head of Conservation International's Okavango project, is angry.

Beyond her a Cessna lifts off from Maun's runway. It banks and heads north, ferrying tourists to the camps in the delta beyond.

The greatest oasis on the planet, the Okavango supports 164 species of mammals, 540 types of bird and enough plants, fish, insects and amphibians to employ David Attenborough for a lifetime. Larger than Wales, the delta is the shattered remains of a river which empties into the Kalahari, a river which winds through Namibia from its source in the Angolan heights.

On its way it passes a place called Rundu where Botswana's neighbouring state of Namibia plans to draw off water in an effort to quench the drought that threatens its capital city.

Windhoek's reservoirs have fallen to 10 per cent of capacity; nearly 40,000 livestock have died so far. The only answer, the Namibians say, is to build a 250km pipeline from the Okavango river. "If we don't build the pipeline and the rains fail again . . ." says Peter Heyns, the senior Namibian water engineer. "To put it bluntly, we'll be in the shit."

Many of the residents of Maun, not least Ross, are deeply concerned by this plan. They themselves are suffering badly from the lack of water. For the first time in memory the river did not reach the town during the annual flood. Much of the town's water is drawn from boreholes, but now the water table is dropping fast.

Ross sees the pipeline as not only unimaginative but also a dangerous precedent. And she is not alone. For the white population of the area, demanding responsibility from the Namibians is a matter of saving the delta. For the black communities, it means saving themselves.

Kehemetswe Saozo sits on an animal skin chair in the shade of his rondavel in Ditshipi, a village in the heart of the delta itself. His clothes are stone-washed by the abrasive Kalahari sands and his face looks weary. "If the water dries up it will be the end of our lives," he says quietly. "All the things of our lives are solely dependent on it."

The Okavango problem is a precursor of things to come. As peace comes to the whole southern African region and development booms, rivers are being used to their maximum. South Africa itself expects to run out of fresh water in the first quarter of the next century and its engineers are already looking north.

The various governments are signing deals to avoid the inevitable confrontations. The Okavango, however, is different: it is unique and development could cost the world, and more importantly Botswana, one of its greatest natural assets.

When the Namibian team flew to Maun to pacify the residents, Heyns found himself facing the white population, a mish-mash of safari operators, hunters and frontier flotsam. He argued that the Namibian pipeline would extract only a small percentage of the Okavango's water and that, given the situation, he had no choice but to go ahead.

He pointed out that it is war-torn Angola that the people of the delta needed to worry about. There was one man notably absent from the meeting: Peter Smith, the author of the letter to Ross. Smith knows more about the water of the delta than any other living soul.

SITTING on his porch, set in a 12-acre plot on the edge of the dry bed of yet another offshoot of the Okavango river, he explains why he agrees with Heyns. "Angola is still in a very poor state, but this is where the greatest threat to the delta lies. Once the country becomes peaceful, people will start settling beside the river. You can't tell them, 'OK, you can live there, but don't drink any water'."

Both Smith and Heyns make pessimistic noises about the delta's future. "The delta's going to shrink," says Smith. "In the past we have never had it so good, but people don't realise those days have gone."

In Maun that view is not acceptable. The whites, many of whom have spent more than a decade building up businesses, know they can still move off if all goes wrong, but local people have no such option. Tawana Moremi, the young head chief of the delta, is taking six months off from his duties. Energetic, intelligent and bitter, he sits drinking in one of the safari camps that dot the edge of Maun's dry river. "I don't like this pipeline very much," he says, morose from alcohol. "We should buy more planes and bomb it."

Botswana has no history of violence towards its neighbours but confrontation between Namibia and Botswana is an idea often raised. Botswana recently tried to buy tanks from Europe but the deal has been scotched, most think by a plea from Namibia. "There has been the suggestion that Botswana wants to buy tanks to shoot at the Namibians because they want to steal water from the Okavango," said Heyns. "That is nonsense; the two things are not connected."

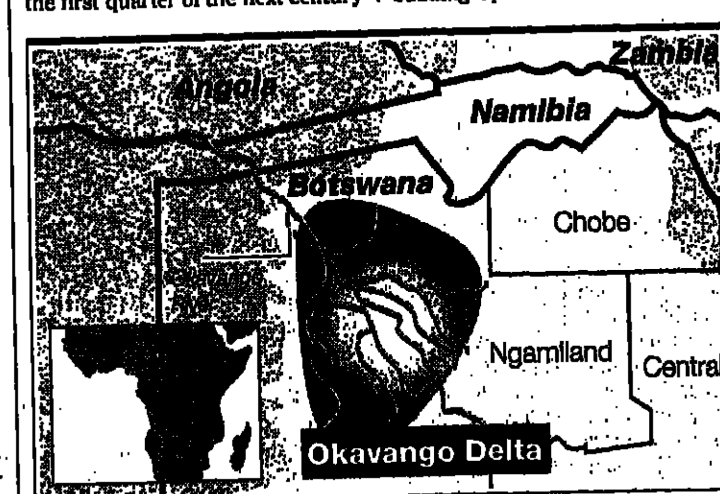
"We were told in June that Namibia had a serious drought problem," said Momemi Sekwale, leader of Botswana's delegation to Okacom, a commission set up by Namibia, Botswana and Angola to ensure prudent use of the river. If Sekwale is angry that Namibia has superseded Okacom, he does not show it: "The position of Botswana is that we cannot oppose a feasibility study; under the circumstances we can only ask to be kept informed."

But that does not go so far as to allow the pipeline to be built. In recent years the Botswana government wanted to dredge an area of the delta but, realising that the effects might prove disastrous, it ditched the plan. It may not view others' irresponsibility charitably.

That people are paranoid about the delta is hardly surprising. Beyond the staggering array of wildlife is a place filled with a diversity of strange people living cheek-by-jowl with a world that occasionally devours them — "Don't become a meal" is a common motto.

Ross points out the work her organisation carries out in its attempt to bring prosperity to the area, arguing that she has to get involved in politics. "If we don't fight policy decisions that could kill the delta then all this is worth nothing," she says pointing to her organisation's achievements.

The delta itself is robust enough to survive anything — except the water being turned off. If that happens then a garden of Eden returns to Kalahari dust. — *The Observer*



Big game, big bucks

Liz McGregor

TO PARAPHRASE Mao, money flows from the barrel of a gun: in the new South Africa, vast tracts of land are being created for foreign sportsmen happy to cough up thousands of dollars to sleep in a rough reed hut and wash in a stream, provided they can go home with a trophy to stick up on the wall.

It's all down to economics. Although foreign tourists are pouring in at the rate of a million a year, not all of them are content to shoot wildlife with a camera. There is, as South African farmers are finding out, big money in hunting as well.

About 9 per cent of land in South Africa is now given over to wildlife. Roughly half of that is state parks: the rest is private land, much of it used for hunting and game ranching — the breeding of wild animals for the hunter's bullet.

There are passionate arguments both for and against this, but in Africa, harshest of continents, it is the most pragmatic that prevails. In a country that can barely afford to feed its human population, wildlife has to pay its way.

Conservation Corporation Africa (CCA), a private game consortium into which Hambros Bank and the Getty family have pumped millions of pounds, dominates the market. It bought a string of failing cattle farms in KwaZulu, built glassed-in tree houses in the only remaining indigenous forest, restocked the place with wild animals and waited for the money to pour in.

There were setbacks: a lion dined on a guest who had slipped away from the dinner table to fetch her jumper, and civil war broke out between Inkatha and the ANC.

Phinda, as the park is called, is surrounded by hunting and game-ranching farms. The general manager, Les Carlisle, defends hunting. "Take rhinos, they're slow breeders and produce only once every four years. If I have an old male, past his prime, with his ribs showing, either I let him die in the veld or I let some German shoot him for $30,000 and I can buy three more at R50,000 each."

Harold Braak, who grew up in the Kruger National Park and is now the chief warden in Skukoza Camp, agrees that hunting and game ranching create more space and ensure a greater diversity in the animal gene pool. He does not allow hunting in the Kruger, but other state parks fence off areas for trophy hunting — it helps to pay the park's bills.

A white rhino hunt is no gladiatorial contest between man and beast. "It's like shooting a cow," said one hunter. "They're very short-sighted and can't see you coming; if you stay out of the direction of the wind, they can't smell you either. One shot through the ear and it's over." For this, the client would part with $30,000.

There are about 400 professional hunters in South Africa. Each year, they hire their services to some 4,000 foreign and 50,000 local hunters.

But it was in the Great Rift Valley that man's ancestors first stood up four million years ago. There is a theory that deep in our unconscious lies a memory of this period when we lived among wild animals in paradise. That is why wildernesses must be maintained — not just for animals, but for humans as well.

Always a step ahead of his business rivals, Rupert Murdoch seems to have stolen one of the biggest marches yet in the form of digital broadcasting. **Henry Porter** wonders if anybody realises the enormous power it puts in the hands of one man

Keeper of the global gate

Rupert Murdoch: 'When you are the monopoly supplier you are inclined to dictate'
PHOTOGRAPH KEVIN LAMARQUE

IN FULL DISCLOSURE, Andrew Neil's telling account of his life as a Murdoch editor, he reveals that Rupert Murdoch's presence is so strong in News International that he appears to his executives in their dreams. It's a pity that politicians have not shared his experience of being woken in the night by the vision of Rupert. If they had, they might begin to dwell on how thoroughly his personality has penetrated Britain's affairs; and they would almost certainly scrutinise the strategy that is about to give his company an unparalleled advantage in national broadcasting.

But the deed is practically done and if you talk to politicians, broadcasters, government departments and the regulatory bodies charged with overseeing the introduction of digital broadcasting by BSkyB in a year's time, you find a mixture of trust, ignorance and defeatism that can only result in commercial triumph for Murdoch.

People seem simply not to grasp the implications of digital broadcasting and the speed with which Murdoch is moving to introduce it by satellite. They don't see how much power will accrue to this foreign national, nor even the danger his company, News Corp, represents to what is an essential and remarkably ill-guarded part of British culture.

True, the subject of digital television requires concentration but it shouldn't mesmerise quite the number of officials that it does. Often when I ventured to one of them that Murdoch's advantage was all but set in stone, they would hurriedly put the phone down to consult their colleagues and then call back to apply balm to the issue, saying that there would be controls and regulations to give all the established broadcasters an equal share in the digital age.

Here, they insist, Mr Murdoch will have to behave, although there is scant evidence of his ever having respected a British institution or any of its regulations. Murdoch is global now, and national governments are only interesting to him in as much as they may help or impede his enormous ambitions.

To understand what is at stake and how Murdoch's empire is about to move several gear changes, you must grasp the technical advances in television. In a nutshell, digital broadcasting is the transmission of high-quality TV along frequencies previously not powerful enough to be used for TV. Because the signal travels in bites of information rather than the conventional analog, it may be compressed during transmission and then decompressed when it reaches a TV set. Vast amounts of information may therefore be carried and this will enable, for instance, BSkyB to broadcast up to 150 channels simultaneously.

A digital broadcast also adds greatly to the quality of the picture and allows the viewer to watch a wide-screen TV that can also take a sidebar of different programmes. So, while watching the football, you may also keep an eye on the news or another match — all of which makes it the perfect advance for the Age of Distraction.

The more important point is that a digital broadcast does not have to go through a satellite. It may be received by a conventional aerial and TV set, provided the viewer has a device known as a set-top box to convert the stream of digital information into sound and pictures.

This is where Murdoch comes in and where everyone gets confused.

BSkyB has announced that it will launch a digital service next year and for this a special set-top box will be designed and marketed. Murdoch's box will be tailored to do two things: decompress the stream of digital information and then decode it. After all this is a subscription service and, like the present signal from Sky, will be broadcast in code so that only those who have paid will be able to watch.

Parallel to Murdoch's activity are the plans by Britain's established broadcasters — the BBC channels, ITV stations and Channel 4 — to develop digital broadcasting. Remember, the digital signal may be conventionally transmitted from a terrestrial station and all that is needed by the viewer is a set-top box. The trouble is that Murdoch has already put out tenders for the design and manufacture of his own box. It will be on the market well before any equivalent device can be agreed upon by the terrestrial broadcasters.

THIS IS THE crucial advantage he has seized. For it is highly unlikely that the British market will accept two separate boxes for the satellite and terrestrial digital services. As Michael Starks, head of the BBC digital project said in May: "It's no good us getting our signals to every household unless we can be reliably received on the householder's consumer equipment. And most householders will buy one receiver [box]."

The point about these boxes is that their manufacture is costly and requires guaranteed orders. While Murdoch has the commercial drive to back the manufacture of his box with orders, the terrestrial broadcasters don't. They are waiting passively to see what his box looks like and whether it can be adapted to take terrestrial digital signals.

Murdoch naturally got the point of all this long before anyone else. In effect he has set up what is known in the trade as the "gateway" to digital services. For a period his gateway will be the sole means of access to the new TV technology. Even the BBC and ITV companies have come to recognise that they must dance to his tune, although they continue to insist vehemently that the development of the alternative terrestrial service will go ahead and that arrangements will be made to manufacture their own device.

So it would seem that you have a simple race between the satellite and terrestrial delivery digital systems in which Murdoch has a head start. But it is not nearly as simple as that because the BBC and the biggest ITV company — Granada — have signed up to be among the 150 services offered on Murdoch's satellite.

This is an extraordinary development. After all, Murdoch threw the BBC off his Star satellite in Asia because it was offending the Chinese government with its news coverage. But now, in a display of corporate forgiveness or forgetfulness, the BBC plans to entrust all its services to him, without guarantees that they will not be buried on the programme guide, or placed in an obscure part of the digital spectrum.

More important is that if BBC and Granada go on the BSkyB satellite, there is a considerably reduced incentive for them to establish a terrestrial service which competes with Murdoch.

It's all very odd: on the one hand the Corporation is co-operating with Murdoch by adding to the value of his service, yet on the other it issues a statement — from a pamphlet called A Glorious Future (August 23) — like this: "The first danger is the dominance of the Gateway into the home. No one person or group should be able to abuse control of the set-top box to inhibit competition. If the digital age is to fulfil its true potential we need in the UK a unified regulatory framework to ensure open and non-discriminatory access to providers on fair financial terms."

Laudable stuff, but plainly the BBC has understood that no one in government or its agencies has taken the slightest notice. The Broadcasting Bill which was enacted in the summer failed to introduce measures to control Murdoch's operation of the gateway. Meanwhile an investigation by the Office of Fair Trading was apparently reassured by BSkyB, which said that it would not act unfairly.

One has the impression of the establishment discreetly waving Murdoch through. It is an impression shared in the City. "There have been rumours", said a media analyst from one of the big financial groups, "that he has contacted both main parties . . . rumours of him having lunch with Michael Heseltine and also talking to other side."

Certainly he has talked to Labour's leader, Tony Blair, on broader aspects of his media interests. Andrew Neil recalls in his book a meeting between Murdoch and Blair: "The dinner went very well. Blair discovered Rupert was not the ogre his party had painted . . . Blair indicated that media ownership rules would not be onerous under Labour, Rupert that his newspapers would not be wedded to the Tories."

If the Labour leader is prepared to be accommodating on the ownership of newspapers by a foreign national, there is no reason why he would object to the advantages Murdoch is taking for himself in digital TV. The same is true of the Conservative party, which is persuaded by the argument that Murdoch has taken huge risks in the launch of satellite TV and is due an initial period of protected growth. With an election imminent, it would be crazy for either main party to take on Murdoch now, but this is not a measure of their cowardice, rather of Mr Murdoch's power, which we should remind ourselves is held by someone who doesn't even have the vote in Britain.

There *are* some worries in Parliament. Labour's National Heritage spokesman, Jack Cunningham, said this: "We raised the issue of common standards for digital television throughout the Broadcasting Bill. It was our strong view that these regulatory matters should have been included in the Bill and not left to secondary legislation. Virginia Bottomley deliberately prevented this from being done."

REGULATION on the design of the box has come in the form of a statutory instrument, which has been drafted by the Department of Trade and Industry and will be enforced by Oftel, the regulatory body for television. It reads: "When granting licences to manufacturers of consumer equipment, holders of industrial property rights to conditional access products and systems shall have the duty that this is done in fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms." What this says is that Murdoch's box must not exclude other broadcasters.

Oftel may also like to look at British Telecom's relationship with Murdoch. This is a widely ignored aspect of the digital revolution, because only a few have anticipated the way things will develop. BT's interest in Murdoch's set-top box is to do with the huge amount of telephone traffic that digital broadcasting is expected to generate from people interacting with their TVs. Within five years or so we will be able to summon videos and purchase things we see on TV. Our orders in response to the digital signal coming into the house will be made along a telephone line.

At present the established terrestrial broadcasters have done no such deal, which means this BT facility will add greatly to the value of Murdoch's service.

The box is important but in some ways it is a distraction, and it seems certain that Murdoch has realised this. What matters to him is launching first with a range of appealing programmes. If the BBC and Granada want to add to his portfolio, all well and good. But the main sales drive will be made by sporting rights and movies, which were responsible for Sky's success in Britain. Conveniently for Murdoch, they also happen to be the two areas of broadcasting which benefit most from widescreen TV — that is to say digital broadcasting.

It is remarkable how the cards seem to fall so well for him. But there again Murdoch has the genius and aggression to think through likely developments, then act on his conclusions. He is also adaptable. Five years ago, he thought movies would do the trick at Sky, but then he realised sport was bringing in far more viewers, which explains why he is now fighting so hard to to win sporting rights all over the world.

At the News Corp's annual meeting in Adelaide earlier this year, Murdoch made his strategy plain: "We have the long-terms rights in most countries to major sporting events and we will be doing in Asia what we intend to do elsewhere in the world — that is, use sports as a battering ram and a lead offering in all our pay television operations."

Sport is what will make Murdoch the *de facto* gatekeeper, irrespective of what boxes are sitting on top of our TV sets. That is the only thing

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Criminals beware

Sarah Boseley meets the women pitting their brains against Britain's cleverest crooks

ANGST-RIDDEN and battered, a maverick voice among the conventional detectives, television's police psychologist Fitz in Cracker is an anti-hero as remote as Jupiter from the real thing — which in Cleveland, since October, has been a young woman named Joanne Cholerton. Aged 25, fresh out of university, sporty and full of enthusiasm, Cholerton has none of the taint of criminality and vice, half-drowned in whisky and cigarette smoke, that infects the characters of every TV police drama. Yet for all that, there is a pioneering toughness about her. How many young women would have the gall to walk into a police station and tell a bunch of seasoned detectives that there are better ways of doing their job?

"I'm usually the only woman in the room and most of them have more experience than I have years. It took a few weeks for me to fit in," Cholerton says with a grin. There have been, she admits, some sceptics, but she is in no way abashed at the situation she is in: a lone young civilian in an institution notorious for its treatment of women; a psychologist hired on an untested project, full of theory about the workings of the criminal mind but with next to no acquaintance with your actual unwashed villain.

Yet Cholerton has already confounded some of the doubters. "We had somebody in for burglary the other day. I said: 'Question him about these four as well' and got the information together for the detectives. They ended up charging him with all five." Her face lights up.

Cleveland police have broken new ground by appointing her to spend a year profiling the burglars of Hartlepool, an industrial town bordering the North Sea. Psychologists, like her tutor at Liverpool university, Professor David Canter, have been called in on serious individual cases before, such as the Yorkshire Ripper and Rachel Nickell murder inquiries; they have also been popularised (and glamorised) by such screen characters as Robbie Coltrane's Fitz in Cracker and Jodie Foster's Agent Clarice Starling in The Silence Of The Lambs.

Now, for the first time, they are in real life being used to target what the police call volume crime. Burglary, Cholerton will tell you, is the biggest problem any police force has to deal with. "When burglary is high, all other crimes are high as well. These people are prolific thieves. It is like you and me going out to work every day — they just go out and commit crime."

Her job, then, is to study the hard-core criminals of Hartlepool. Four detectives have been specially trained to visit every house that is burgled and return with a 33-page pro forma that will give the psychologist far more information than the average crime report. She needs to know what he did and did not do; what he took and what he left.

Matching features of these crimes, Cholerton is able to recognise the behaviour of certain burglars and even to tell detectives more or less where they might live. She can narrow the list of suspects to a few — perhaps even one — who has committed such crimes before and may be known to the police.

"The very experienced detectives know what is going on and probably have a good idea who is committing the crimes, but when it comes down to it, they are usually wrong," Cholerton says matter-of-factly. "Rather than using their experience and intuition, we are looking systematically to target these people."

She is one of a new breed from Liverpool university's investigative psychology unit — the only place in Britain that trains graduates specifically for such police work. It has been running for only four years, yet half a dozen police forces in Britain, and others overseas, have taken its students.

Canter is indignant at the comparisons between fictional psychologists and the real ones. All of it, he says, is based on wrong premises.



Joanne Cholerton: 'I take a lot of flak' PHOTO STUART OUTTERSIDE

"To make a serial killer interesting, there is a tendency to make him verbally very sophisticated and able to avoid police detection. But if you do a study of how they get caught, it is often through silly mistakes like leaving fingerprints or releasing a victim who can identify them. They are not these brilliant minds."

Most extraordinarily of all, he claims many detectives are themselves taken in by fictions that are stranger than life. "It is fascinating when you talk to police officers how they will be making assumptions early on about who they are looking for that don't concur with the facts of criminological literature. In a child abuse case, for example, the idea that it will be a dirty old man in a mac hanging around the school gates is very strong, but it is more likely to be a local youngster."

Now his students, Canter claims, "are rattling the police chains . . . making them reconsider a lot of what they do."

The potential for mutual unhappiness is enormous. Cholerton recognises this in her praise for Cleveland. "It is a huge initiative for them and it is very brave of them to be the first to implement it." But it is she who stands to get the rough ride. "I do have to stand up and take a lot of flak," she admits. "But I look for challenges."

Karyn McClusky joined another innovative force, East Sussex, last year from Canter's course. She says she has encountered no resistance from police officers. "I have had every bit of help from Sussex. I'm very impressed with them. I expected a lot of reticence. I got none."

She is aged 31, teaches boxing as a hobby, has a degree in nursing, worked in the prison service and was once manager of a company — all of which must help command some respect, together with her love of the job and, she points out, the fact that her efforts reduce the work of the detectives. "They may have a hundred suspects and we are saying these are the three to look at first."

At the scene of the crime, she will be looking at the way the offender got into the property: "But how they possess the house when they are in there is much more indicative. It gives you an idea of the criminal history — if they have been in prison or not, for instance. They become much more forensically aware once they have been in prison. Then there are things like artifice — conning their way into people's houses or using children."

Sarah Wardle, a Canter student in the area intelligence unit at the Metropolitan Police, will be moving in January to New Scotland Yard's intelligence directorate.

"When we first arrived, it was a very new thing and it has taken quite a while for us to learn about the police force itself and to show the benefits of our work," she says. "There are policemen who may have been initially sceptical, but it didn't take long to prove our worth — about five or six months. We're here really as support tools — not to take away police jobs."

These are outgoing, confident, professional women who are breaking new ground and loving it. If the work they are doing is having anything like the impact Canter claims, then there is a small but very positive revolution going on in some of Britain's more go-ahead police forces. It can only be good news for women — and for the crime rate.

Keeper of the global gate

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you need to understand about the launch of digital TV by Sky. Now that he has his head start and a menu of programmes, there isn't really very much legislators can do — particularly at this moment in the electoral cycle.

Murdoch has sensed that there simply isn't the political will to contain his power in Britain. Indeed, he has discovered all over the world that national governments will drop their objections to his plans for short-term political advantage.

He is adept at local fire-fighting and with an empire that now stretches from Australia through Asia to Europe and America, he must expect the odd local difficulty. But the main point is that News Corp has arrived at an extraordinarily significant moment in its development. The five years since Murdoch's desperate global pilgrimage to re-finance his company have produced technical breakthroughs of which even he had never dreamed. Today his is one of the few world companies with the apparatus and the central command to apply them quickly. He is absorbed by the immediate opportunity that may be gained in what is the brief aperture between invention and general application.

He said last July: "When you are the monopoly distributor you are inclined to dictate." The Americans are beginning to get the picture that in the age of information it is the means of distribution, not supply, that call the shots. Viacom's chairman, Sumner Redstone, who had been forced to sell an interest in one of his companies to Murdoch in order to get it on to BSkyB, said earlier this year: "Rupert wants to rule the world and he seems to be doing it."

Murdoch's expansion is vertiginous. As if overseeing the digital project in Britain isn't enough, next year Murdoch will launch ASkyB — American Sky Broadcasting — which will offer some 200 channels to the vast US market. He has also done deals with national telecom companies such as MCI in the US and BT in Britain to launch Internet service companies. His on-line venture with BT, Springboard, will be used, among other things, to publish a programme guide for BSkyB's satellite digital service.

The whole structure of News Corp interlocks beautifully, so that the components support each other throughout the world. It's not simply in terms of revenue and services but also in propaganda. If a politician or businessman stands in the way of Murdoch's advance, any of his newspapers in four continents may be swiftly deployed to remove the obstacle. It is as if William Randolph Hearst were alive again.

The tone of menace his newspapers employ is precisely what scares the pants off British politicians.

If anyone doubts his antipathy to liberal democracy or to the independence of his newspaper editors they have only to read Andrew Neil's book. Neil, once a close colleague of Murdoch's, who moved the Sunday Times to Wapping and helped to bail out Sky TV in its early stages, was immediately sidelined when his newspaper's coverage began to threaten Murdoch's TV interests in southeast Asia. Murdoch has loyalty only to his ambition and his children, who are being groomed in various quarters of his empire to take over. For someone so wholly opposed to the inherited power of the royal family, he is displaying remarkably dynastic tendencies.

It is nearly 18 years since the Conservative party came to power and slightly less since Murdoch bought Times Newspapers and began his remarkable expansion. The Conservatives have been benevolent in the extreme to Rupert Murdoch. This has allowed him to use Britain as a cash cow and a launch-pad to America, where he challenges the three main entertainment corporations of Time Warner, Disney and Viacom. He is now a world power and as far as he is concerned Britain is little more than a ridiculous parish of chatterers.

The reaction of British politicians is to receive him for lunch and to do tricks for him at his conferences. They fuss about the loss of national sovereignty to the European Union, yet never for one moment note the concessions that have been made in Britain's national affairs to this sardonic global operator.

Politicians congratulate themselves on the pragmatic view that Murdoch is a fact of British political life. But if they were to regard him not as a means to victory in an election but rather as one of the more important electoral issues, Britain might begin to claw back some of its independence. There are, after all, many ways that Murdoch's presence in Britain can be addressed. There is the question of his paying UK tax. In 1995, for instance, he paid not one penny of the 35 per cent corporation tax. Is there any reason why he should not be pressed to reveal exactly the network of offshore companies which claim tax advantages in every quarter of the world?

And what of his growing spread in the British media? At present he has more than 30 per cent of the newspaper market and with the built-in advantages of launching satellite digital broadcasting early he is likely to achieve a 25 per cent penetration of that market. Perhaps it is time to haul Murdoch in front of parliamentary committees to face questions about the independence of his editors, the persistent bias of his newspapers, his trading practices and the total disregard for British television culture and the sporting calendar.

But all the Government does is wave feeble statutory instruments and hope that Rupert Murdoch will behave. Dream on.

Letter from Bermuda Elizabeth Jones

To the glory of blinkered belief

NOVEMBER 17, 1996, Bermuda's Cobb's Hill Methodist Church held its anniversary service exactly 169 years after it was completed and dedicated.

The building itself is simply constructed with grey-painted walls, green wooden shutters, a white-ridged roof and a rather squat stone spire left unpainted, as is customary in Bermuda. But the sign affixed to the gateway gives the clue to the powerful story of the church's history. It says: "Dedicated to the Glory of God. Built by Slaves in the Moonlight."

Slaves in Bermuda were often forbidden from attending church with the result that they resorted to listening and worshipping outside. In 1800, the Reverend John Stephenson, the first Wesleyan missionary to regularly preach in Bermuda, was fined £50 and imprisoned for six months because he had committed the "crime" of preaching to slaves and to "free men of colour". He was defended, albeit unsuccessfully, by John Christie Esten, a lawyer, who later became Bermuda's chief justice.

In 1818 a young evangelist, Edward Fraser, came to Bermuda from Barbados and preached to the slaves encouraging them to build their own church. He was later to become an ordained minister.

What is remarkable is that Fraser was himself a slave. His missionary work attracted the notice of Esten, who in 1825 sold to the slaves a plot of land for 10 shillings so that their dream of a church could become reality. Under Fraser's supervision, they toiled mostly through moonlit nights and during the odd holiday. They cut the stone from nearby quarries, and women and children helped by carrying the stone blocks on their heads, shoulders and backs.

There was no moon the night of this year's anniversary, but in spite of the blustery weather the simple wooden pews were packed. As I listened to the gospel hymns, "Consider my Soul" and "The Storm is Passing Over", I felt comforted that faith and determination can transcend even the worst of sociological and political evils. Today, many Bermudians are descendants of the first black leaders and members of Cobb's Hill Church. Indeed, after the next election one descendant, Jennifer Smith, may well become the first woman premier.

And yet, in the middle of the service, I felt disquiet. One speaker explained the history and mentioned that the church had recently chosen to break its association with the United Church of Canada. When the guest preacher gave his sermon, the reason became abundantly clear. The church, he said, must resist "demons" that threaten it — those demons are "homosexuals and lesbians who cannot be fruitful because they cannot multiply".

The United Church of Canada will accept homosexuals as ministers but Cobb's Hill will not. And if the preacher is to be believed, it will not welcome them as members of the congregation either.

I should not be surprised. Until 1994, homosexuality in Bermuda was illegal. The vote to change the law caused massive controversy and an outpouring of vitriolic criticism from fundamentalists, both black and white. Laws may change fast but attitudes do not.

During the service one speaker voiced the hope that Cobb's Hill Church would make its 200th anniversary. Will it take that long before the whole church realises that the most dangerous "demon" to threaten the Christian message is the hypocrisy that gives rise to exclusion? After all, it was hypocrisy that allowed Christians to support slavery in the first place.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

WHICH countries do not have any McDonald's?

MONGOLIA has no McDonald's. There are several possible reasons: Big Macs don't contain nearly enough grease and are too tender for Mongolian taste; mutton, goat, yak and camel burgers have yet to be invented; and Mongolian meat simply tastes too good. However, we can just see the McGoat baked in its own skin over red-hot stones taking off if only McDonald's had the initiative. — *David Hollingworth and Elizabeth Hughes, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia*

BERMUDA has no McDonald's. However, therein lies a story worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan. Some 20 years ago, Kentucky Fried Chicken sneaked into Bermuda. Horrified defenders of the "British" image banned further franchises. In the late eighties, McDonald's opened on the US base, and the US Navy decided to allow Bermudians access once a week to sample the wares. The base was closed in 1995, and with it went McDonald's.

A few months later, the premier of 13 years resigned (following the defeat of his independence referendum) and within weeks it was announced that he had been given permission to set up a company to operate McDonald's. There was outrage.

A former deputy premier then brought a bill to parliament banning all fast-food franchises including, retroactively, McDonald's. This passed the *House* with the assistance of the opposition and a group of "rebel" MPs. The Senate defeated the bill, so it then had to go back to the House. In late November the bill came up for discussion. As the sponsor was not in the House the Speaker threw out the bill. And so Bermuda has no McDonald's, but for how much longer? — *Sue Simons, Bermuda*

JAMIE FERGUSON is a little out of date (December 1). India's first McDonald's opened in Delhi in October. It is the world's first beef-free McDonald's. I had a Maharaja Mac, made with lamb. — *Nick Whitehead, Geneva, Switzerland*

SEYCHELLES, in the Indian Ocean, does not have a McDonald's. However, fortunately for returning expatriates, Gatwick airport does. — *A J Tracey, Victoria, Seychelles*

UZBEKISTAN has Korean burgers, Turkish burgers and downright Inedible burgers but as yet no McDonald's. And I don't believe that the company has branched out into Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan either. — *Emma Webb, United Nations, Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

THERE is no McDonald's in Ecuador but there have been advertisements recently seeking investors with $1.5 million to start a franchise. — *Ken MacHarg, Quito, Ecuador*

THERE is no McDonald's in Sri Lanka — is this paradise? — *Alyson Hilbourne, OSC, Sri Lanka*

NIRVANA — *Ken Frank, Izmir, Turkey*

CAN ventriloquists "throw" their voices? If genuine, how is the phenomenon achieved?

THE HUMAN ear has two basic methods of locating the source of a sound. The first involves the difference in the time of arrival of the leading edge of a sound at the two ears. The sound is presumed to be nearer the ear that hears it first. There is nothing a ventriloquist can do to subvert this mechanism.

The other method is based on the shape of the pinna, the external fleshy protuberance often referred to as the "ear". It is asymmetrical, and has very different frequency-response characteristics in different directions. By noting the frequency envelope of a sound in each ear, and comparing that with an internal "ideal" version of the sound, the listener can work out whether the sound came from the left or right, front or back, and whether from above or below ear level.

By carefully shaping the frequencies produced by the voice, a ventriloquist can, in principle, mimic the frequency envelope of a voice coming from a direction other than the real one. Of course, a ventriloquist who is a performer is just as likely to use stage-magic techniques, such as misdirection and sheer showmanship, as he is to use difficult and complex voice control. — *Richard Hussong, Acton, Massachusetts, USA*

IN VENTRILOQUISM, what is "thrown" is not the ventriloquist's voice, but the listener's perception. The listener identifies the wrong physical source of the voice through an illusion created by the ventriloquist. While the dummy or puppet is allegedly talking, the ventriloquist articulates speech without moving lips or jaw, and holds the mouth slightly open so that sound escapes yet movements are not readily visible. Humans are easily fooled when visual and auditory signals conflict. The listener connects the talking with any mouth-like object whose movements are coordinated with the voice: a sock puppet will do; so will a more elaborate dummy. — *Ian MacKay, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada*

Here, there but not quite everywhere . . . McDonald's has reached Tiananmen Square but not Mongolia or Bermuda PHOTO: MIKE FUNG

KING Henry VII set up a court for the poor which charged no fees and gave free legal aid. Is this court still in existence; if not, when was it abolished, and can it be resurrected?

HENRY VII introduced the *in forma pauperis* procedure in 1495. This allowed plaintiffs worth less than £5 (which included clothing) to bring their case to the higher courts if they could find a lawyer willing to undertake their case and to issue a certificate to that effect. The certificate cost one mark (30p). The plaintiff would be expected to pay any expenses such as witnesses' travel costs. If the plaintiff won more than £5, there would also be court costs of at least £4.

The 1495 Act was replaced in 1883 by the Statute Law Revision and Civil Procedure Act. At this time, the procedure was extended to admit defendants; the limit was raised from £5 to £25, and both the value of the applicant's clothing and the subject of the dispute were disregarded; and an additional test excluded applicants with an income of more than £1.50 per week. It still remained difficult to find a willing solicitor until the current Legal Aid scheme was set up in 1950. — *Stephen Humphreys, Fulwood, Preston*

HOW many people has the mobile phone already killed on the road?

A RECENT report by the Japanese National Police Agency says that mobile phones caused 537 traffic accidents in Japan between July and September this year, resulting in five deaths and 754 injuries. — *Peter J Mallett, Kobe, Japan*

ARE VCRS available that skip the adverts?

TELEVISION stations in Switzerland, Germany and Austria transmit a VPS signal for each programme. This ensures that the VCR only records the desired programme irrespective of whether it starts too early or later than scheduled. At the end of the recording a second VPS signal switches the VCR off. The VCR stops recording when the programme has been interrupted for advertisements and continues when they end. — *Norman D Parry, Zurich, Switzerland*

I HAVE a Japanese VCR and can cut out advertisements, but only for programmes which are broadcast "bilingually" in Japanese and English. Two signals are sent simultaneously, and the viewer selects the one he wants. When the commercials arrive the signal is sent only in Japanese, so the video can recognise the change and pause until the bilingual signal begins anew. — *Greville Field, Hiratsuka, Japan*

I'VE read that the name Gary derives entirely from the popularity of movie actor Gary Cooper in the 1940s and that, previously, there were no Garys in Britain.

THE CITY of Gary (Indiana — but really part of the Chicago SMSA) existed long before Gary Cooper. Fort Garry (now Winnipeg) was Lord Selkirk's contribution to the Scottish migration to Canada. I suspect that Gary is an Anglo-Scottish name of relatively ancient origin— *Keith Bricknell, Winnipeg, Canada*

Any answers?

CAN anyone cite a few idols of this century who are still above reproach? — *Bob Heys, Ripponden, Halifax*

I HAVE heard that if you pass enough electricity through a pickled cucumber it will glow bright green. If this is true, how do I demonstrate it without endangering my life? — *Susan Eisen, Newcastle upon Tyne*

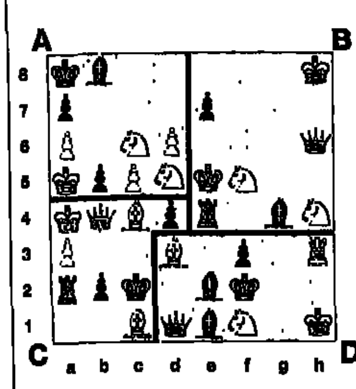
HOW can I become a gay icon? — *Mavis Francis, Walton on Thames, Surrey*

HOW does a "controlled explosion" avoid blowing up the bomb being made safe? — *Peter Severs, Dore, Sheffield*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Best Ever Notes & Queries is now available, price £8.99

Chess Leonard Barden

THE CHRISTMAS PUZZLE, created by Britain's best-ever composer, Comins Mansfield, was first published on December 25, 1914. It's really four problems in one, where the pieces may not be moved outside the boundaries shown by the black lines. Thus in B (top right) the black king at e5 counts as checkmated if it is in check and the only escape is outside the black line at d6, d5 or d4.



In each of the four problems, White "checkmates" as above in two moves, against any defence.

Send White's first moves for puzzles A, B, C and D to Christmas Chess, Weekend Guardian, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER to arrive by first post on Monday, January 27, 1997. Every entrant, right or wrong, will receive a complimentary copy of the British Chess Magazine (+44-171-603 2877).

There are awards of £50, £30 and £20 for the first three correct solutions examined after the closing date, and the three winners will also each receive a London chess set from Tournament Chess Supplies (+44-170 765 9080). This new £10 set has pieces elegantly moulded and felted in the classical pre-1939 Staunton pattern and, unlike most plastic sets, it is produced solely in Britain.

● For a new Christmas opening that you can learn while enjoying the mince pies, try this gambit variation of the Centre Counter which has scored some fast victories in recent years. Today's games provide just the outline of Black's ideas, but you can explore it in more detail via the excellent GM Video release by consulting Centre Counter Carnage by IM Andrew Martin (screen time 75 minutes, £14.99, available from leading chess suppliers).

P Romilly v A Martin, Aberdeen 1991

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 White can also try to keep the pawn by 3 Bb5+ Nbd7 4 c4, but then a6 5 Ba4 b5! is useful: 6 cxb5 Nxd5 7 bxa6 Bxa6 8 d4 Nb4 9 Bc2 e5 10 Be4 exd4 11 Ne2 d3 12 Nd4 Bc5 13 Nc6? Nc2+ 14 Kf1 Qh4 15 Qf3 d2+ and White resigned in Wiltshire v Bryson, Glasgow 1996.

e6!? The Icelandic Gambit, a bold alternative to 3 . . . c6 4 d4 (4 dxc6 Nxc6 gives Black good play) cxd5 5 Nc3 which transposes to the Panov line of the Caro-Kann.

4 dxe6 Bxe6 5 d4?! The cautious 5 Nf3 is better. **Bb4+ 6 Bd2** Ruxton v Hsu, 1989, continued 6 Nc3 Ne4 7 Qd3 Bf5 8 Qf3 Qxd4 9 Ne2 Qd7 10 a3 Nc6! 11 Bf4 (11 axb4 Ne5) Ne5! 12 Qe3 Nd3+ 13 Kd1 Bc5 and White resigned.

Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2 Qe7! The key idea which prepares long castling. **8 Qe3 Nc6 9 Nf3** If 9 d5 Nb4 10 Na3 Nbxd5! gives a winning attack. **0-0-0 10 Be2 Rhe8 11 0-0 Bg4 12 Nc3?** 12 Qxe7 is best, though Black has good play for a pawn. **Bxf3 13 Bxf3 Qb4!** Gaining material. **14 Qg5 Nxd4 15 Bg4+ Nxg4 16 Qxg4+ f5 17 Qxg7? Qxb2 18 Rac1 Ne2+! 19 Resigns.**

● Irina Levitina, who played for the women's world championship and for the all-conquering Soviet olympiad team, has become the first player to win gold at both chess and bridge. She emigrated to New York six years ago and last month was in the US women's team which won the bridge olympiad in Rhodes.

No 2452: 1 Rb1. If Kxb1 2 Kd1 b6 3 Bh7. If 1 . . . b6 2 Raa1 axb1 3 Bh7.

ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

Preserving core assets

Mark Cocker

AS I LOOK out from our upstairs window over the Norwich skyline — an urban jumble of domestic terraces, office blocks and occasional church towers — I find it hard to imagine its Tudor equivalent. For although many of its older buildings still stand, Norwich has lost the essential character of its 16th century predecessor. "Either a city in an orchard, or an orchard in a city" is a past testament to the rural spirit which once existed here and has been largely obliterated by modern development.

Yet Norwich's loss of fruit trees at least makes it representative of the wider landscape, since there has been a nationwide decline of frightening proportions in orchards, about 320 square kilometres of fruit trees having been destroyed in the past 30 years. In the 1990s these losses have even accelerated owing to European Union policies designed to halt over-production of fruit. Government subsidies offered to those grubbing up their commercial orchards have been disproportionately popular among British growers. In 1995 alone, almost £11 million was paid for the removal of 2,500 hectares. More than half Britain's orchards have now gone, and at the current rates of loss they will have vanished completely by 2020.

One could understand these developments if Britain were over-producing, or if the country were marginal for fruit cultivation. Yet we are now only 30 per cent self-sufficient in the production of apples and pears, and annually import more than 400,000 tonnes. Worse still, Britain, with a climate and soils perfectly suited to apple and pear cultivation, has a history of fruit-growing that goes back to the Saxon era.

The richness of this tradition can be appreciated when you realise that more than 6,000 types of British apple have so far been identified. At one time a single orchard might contain 200 of these, while almost every parish had its own unique variety. In Gloucestershire, for example, there were 100 different types of perry pear.

However, my favourite glimpse of Britain's lost fruit paradise concerns a single tree growing on the banks of the River Wye near Hereford. This pear had been allowed to spread so freely that its branches had eventually drooped to the ground and then re-rooted. By the late 18th century this one living tree covered almost a third of a hectare and produced 5-7 tonnes of fruit a year.

Fortunately, the steady decline of Britain's fruit traditions has not gone unnoticed, and a major salvage operation has been pioneered by Common Ground. The free spirits among Britain's environmental community, Common Ground has no members and creates no formal structures; rather it seeks to serve as a catalyst and to influence other organisations. Its most singular contribution has been to explore and honour local distinctiveness in the rural environment and to re-awaken public appreciation of commonplace elements.

British apples, with all their local history and associations, have been the focus of their efforts for several years. The achievements to date have been impressive, and include the creation of a new national event, Apple Day on October 21, when people all over the country have the opportunity to celebrate the importance of their own local fruit produce.

The British have a lucky habit of realising — if only, perhaps, at the eleventh hour — the value of homegrown traditions. The classic example was the impact of the Campaign for Real Ale, which in 30 years has made a contribution to improving the British public house and the nation's beer-drinking habits. Such a precedent should fortify Common Ground in its own mission to preserve the economic, cultural and aesthetic riches of the nation's fruit trees.

Bridge Zia Mahmood

DECEMBER 25 is probably the only day of the year on which there isn't a bridge tournament going on somewhere in the world. I say probably because otherwise I will get a letter from the Much-Festering-under-Lyme Bridge Club telling me they've been holding a tournament on Christmas Day for the past 50 years. For the rest of you, who may be suffering withdrawl symptoms, here is something to keep you occupied until the bridge season starts on December 26.

In this year's Christmas competition, you are asked to consider the bidding problems below and rank the calls given in order of preference. For example, if the three calls were Pass, 1NT and 2♠, and you decided that 2♠ was best, pass next best and 1NT worst, you should answer: 1. 2♠ 2. Pass 3. 1NT.

My apologies if this seems obvious, but on previous occasions people who might very well have won the competition have given just one answer to each question, selecting only the call they thought best!

Assume that you are playing rubber bridge at a strong table — partner and the opponents are all good players. You are playing Acol — four-card majors and a weak no trump. You are South on each occasion, and the vulnerability is Love all.

PROBLEM 1

South	West	North	East
1♠	No	1NT	No
?			

♠AKJ76 ♥A2 ♦73 ♣AQ95
Rank in order of preference:
2♣; 2NT; 3♣.

PROBLEM 2

South	West	North	East
			3♦
?			

♠A10953 ♥KQ72 ♦4 ♣K65
Rank in order of preference:
Pass; double; 3♠

PROBLEM 3

South	West	North	East
1♠	No	2♥	No
?			

♠KQ9832 ♥Q65 ♦A4 ♣Q6
Rank in order of preference:
2♠; 3♥; 4♥

PROBLEM 4

South	West	North	East
			1♥
?			

♠AKJ743 ♥A32 ♦AJ6 ♣4
Rank in order of preference:
Double; 1♠; 2♠

PROBLEM 5

South	West	North	East
1♦	No	1♠	No
?			

♠5 ♥AJ82 ♦AQ1093 ♣A43
Rank in order of preference:
1NT; 2♦; 2♥

Answers should be sent to the following address: Guardian Weekend Christmas Bridge Competition, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER. Fax: +44-171 239 9935, email: weekend@guardian.co.uk

All competition entries should arrive at our offices no later than January 27, 1997. There will be a prize of £100 awarded for the first winning answer that is drawn from the hat, and two prizes of £50 will also be given to the runners-up. Good luck. ©

Quick crossword no. 346

Across

1 Rescind (6)
4 Project (6)
9 Judicious (7)
10 Fragrance (5)
11 Instruct (5)
12 Self-important (7)
13 Bell-ringing (11)
18 Stabilizer (7)
20 Stall (5)
22 Light boat (5)
23 Suite (7)
24 Sea song (6)
25 Span (6)

Down

1 Esteem (6)
2 Country house (5)
3 Tomato sauce (7)
5 Kingdom (5)
6 Lengthen (7)
7 Establish connection (6)
8 Needle work (11)
14 1996 Olympics site (7)
15 Crustacean (7)
16 Counting frame (6)
17 Dairy product (6)
19 Vigilant (5)
21 Possessed (5)

Last week's solution

MEDICO MODEL
ALASKA SUMMIT
CUBA FANDANGO
CONTRIVANCE
WATCHDOG TOGA
VIGOUR TWINGE
LUNGE FRIGID

Tenor for my thoughts

Placido Domingo is *the* Verdi tenor of the age, writes **Martin Kettle.** And he hasn't stopped for a quarter of a century


Domingo as Otello at Covent Garden in 1987 PHOTO: NEIL LIBBERT

WE GO back a bit, Placido Domingo and me. I have always known — who could forget such a thing? — that I heard him in his debut role at Covent Garden 25 years ago this month. But I hadn't realised until I checked that I was actually there on the very night, December 8, 1971, when Domingo first stepped on to the stage in Bow Street and sang Cavaradossi in Tosca.

A quarter of a century ago I was just getting into opera. It was probably my first Tosca of all. I was young and thrilled. Domingo was young*ish* (this exact age has always been a bit of a mystery) and thrilling. I sat in the gods at the opera. He became my god of the opera.

I'm afraid that Domingo also turned me into an opera nerd. I kept the programme from that first night and, the shame of it, I've kept most programmes ever since. But at least it meant that this month, when I needed it, there it was, filed in the right place. December 8, 1971. The 239th Covent Garden Tosca. Gwyneth Jones in the title role. Kostas Paskalis as Scarpia. And Domingo as Cavaradossi.

I have two distinct memories of how Domingo sang that night in Franco Zeffirelli's famous production. I remember how amply his tenor soared across the orchestra in Recondita Armonia in Act One and I'll never forget his prodigiously extended cries of Vittoria in Act Two.

Twenty-five years on, Domingo celebrated his 1971 debut with a single performance this month at Covent Garden. As it happens, Zeffirelli's indestructible Tosca is currently having its umpteenth revival. But Domingo is no longer really a Cavaradossi. Instead, he chose to conduct one performance of Tosca and to mark his anniversary by singing a role he has never performed in London at all, and which he has only rarely sung anywhere else. And what a role. Siegmund in Die Walküre, Domingo's first London Wagner, his first Germanic role here, and the 20th different part he has sung at Covent Garden.

The contrast between the two roles — from a full-hearted lyric Italian part to a stamina-sapping Wagnerian Heldentenor role — tells you a lot about Domingo. *In fact, I think* it tells you why he is the most admirable opera singer of recent times. He is always willing to try something new.

The 20 roles he has sung at Covent Garden are predominantly roles that the great tenors of his type would have sung in their own careers at any time this century. Three-quarters of them are Italian, mainly Verdi and Puccini, though with a couple of Giordanos thrown in. Four are French roles, including Don José in Carmen, a part in which he excels. It is the sort of list of parts that Caruso would have sung.

I have heard about half of them, and for me the great highlights have overwhelmingly been Domingo's Verdi roles. He is, many would say, *the* Verdi tenor of the age. If one were to make a really crude comparison between the two most famous tenors of the era, I would say that Pavarotti is the supreme Puccini singer and Domingo the champion in Verdi.

Partly this is because he looks so good in these roles. The two Domingo roles that stay with me down the years are both late Verdi parts. He sang Radames in Aida rarely in London, but the performance I caught at Covent Garden in the 1970s was a connoisseur's occasion, with the young Domingo capturing the drama and encompassing the role as no one since.

Few who have experienced it will deny that the greatest of all his roles was, and still is, Otello. Domingo first sang the part at Covent Garden in 1980 with Margaret Price as Desdemona, conducted by Carlos Kleiber.

Seven years later, he returned with Kleiber to give a series of performances, repeated in 1990, which were for me the most wonderful evenings I have ever spent in any opera house. What struck me then was how, at the height of his powers, Domingo could develop and extend his interpretation of the Moor so magnificently. Even in 1980, *Domingo's Otello* was the stuff of instant legends, but the 1987 performances revealed an even darker and more tragic hue to the always strong, supple and generously toned voice. Domingo in Otello always makes me think of brightly burnished copper, shining and weighty at one and the same time.

That would have been enough for most singers, but Domingo has always pressed on into new territory. Tristan remains, the greatest of all Heldentenor peaks, dreamed of but as yet unscaled. To sing it would put Domingo in the select group of singers — Melchior, Vinay and Vickers — who were great Otellos and great Tristans. He could do it. And I hope he still will.

I don't say that those who stick to the tried and tested are lesser artists because of it. I will simply say this. Who else would even *think* of undertaking such a range of roles today? And who sings *any* of the key ones better than he does? He is not just the best Otello, Don Carlos and Radames. He is also the best Parsifal I have ever heard, better even than Siegfried Jerusalem.

His rendering of Winterstürme was almost like a concert aria but was absolutely exemplary none the less. It felt odd to hear Wagner sung like this. But then it is odd, unique even. London Wagner audiences have not heard such beautiful and *effortless legato singing* from a tenor for years. For once, though here was a Wagner tenor who not only sang every note exactly in tune, but sang it with phrasing and line. Domingo reminded us that Wagner's tenor parts are not actually written to be barked and battled with, but to be sung, caressed, and, yes, even enjoyed. Let us hope that there will be more Wagner from him in future seasons.

Dependence days

Derek Malcolm takes a sceptical look back at the movies of 1996

I HAVE recently seen Barbra Streisand's The Mirror Has Two Faces, in which our beloved if narcissistic star is supposed to spend three-quarters of a long movie looking like an Ugly Duckling and the last quarter like Cinderella at the ball. The fact that she actually looks quite pretty as the duckling and fairly awful tarted up à la Hollywood as Cinderella doesn't alter the fact that The Mirror Has Two Faces expresses almost perfectly my experiences as a film critic during 1996.

Three-quarters of the time it was *a bit like purgatory. One quarter of* the time it was, if not heaven, at least better than going to the office every day. It was, in fact, a weird year in which Hollywood produced a bevy of films that hit the box-office with such a clatter that they may well figure in the lists of all-time popular successes. Unfortunately, most of them appeared to be braindead.

The characters were plastic, the screenplays simply a matter of getting them from one piece of action to another, and only the special effects were left to entertain anyone who admires popular films.

The most successful of all was Independence Day which, at the last count, has raised $306 million in America and $391 million in the rest of the world. Why so? Well, the very skilful and expensive hype contributed. So did the fact that it was patriotic, feelgood and spectacular.

The other huge swingers of the summer were Mission: Impossible, Twister, The Rock and The Nutty Professor, with Eraser and the animated Hunchback Of Notre Dame not far behind. Each of these films had production budgets of around or more than $60 million, and none of them could possibly be said to be in any way memorable from the moment you left the cinema.

No, it was not a good year for quality in Hollywood, though you *could certainly say that the City of* Dreams managed, most of the time, to bask in the glory of one movie or another that gave world audiences, if not critics, exactly what they appeared to want.

And what of the stars? As usual, some went down and some went up the pecking order. Demi Moore (Striptease), Geena Davis (Cut-Throat Island and The Long Kiss Goodnight), Keanu Reeves (was Speed a fluke?) and Julia Roberts (Mary Reilly) went down. And up came Nicolas Cage (Leaving Last Vegas, for which he got the Oscar, and The Rock, for which he was paid millions), Brad Pitt (Seven, Twelve Monkeys), Samuel Jackson (never bad, in a lot of movies), and Sean Penn (Dead Man Walking).

Two people reinvented themselves — Madonna (as a lookalike Eva Peron in Evita) and Eddie Murphy (as the fatso in the highly successful The Nutty Professor, after a string of failures). Newcomers to stardom included George Clooney (From Dusk Till Dawn and now as the new Batman), Matthew McConaughey (A Time To Kill, Lone Star), Kate Winslet (Sense And Sensibility, Jude) and Ewan McGregor (Trainspotting, Emma, The Pillow Book).

But when all is said and done about star power, one can only find a very few even near top-quality American films. And, of these, hardly any were properly Hollywood product. There was Martin Scorsese's Casino, which proved that Sharon Stone could perform as well as look sexy; there was Michael Mann's impressive Heat, which gave De Niro and Pacino a chance to act cat and mouse together for the first (and possibly last) time, and there was Dead Man Walking, an intelligent attack on the American desire for vengeance against criminals, preferably by death.

There was also Fargo, one of the best films the Coen brothers have produced since Blood Simple. And John Sayles, great man of the American independent scene, wrote and directed Lone Star, his best for some time. The surprise was David Fincher's Seven, a violent but holding thriller camped up with literary references and darkly memorable visual effects.

Wayne Wang and Paul Auster's Smoke, Mike Figgis's Leaving Las Vegas, Oliver Stone's uneven but highly watchable Nixon and Todd Haynes's Safe make up the list of good US films. Of these, Safe — seen by hardly anyone, but a truly impressive tale of a woman suffering from an acutely physical form of ME — seemed to me one of the very best films of the year.

THE SUDDEN death of Krzysztof Kiéslowski effectively murdered any thoughts of the kind of significant European revival he instigated. It was left to Claude Sautet and Eric Rohmer, two French veterans, and Bigas Lunas and Pedro Almodóvar, two eccentric Spanish talents, to hold up the flag of non-English-speaking European films here. Rohmer's A Summer's Tale and Sautet's Nelly And Monsieur Arnaud were class efforts from masters at their trade, while Almodóvar's Flower Of My Secret was a welcome return to form and Lunas's lunatic Tit And The Moon was as ironic a sexual fantasy as ever imagined by a pornographer on the make (which Lunas is definitely not).

But it was generally left to the Brits to save things for Europe, which they did by winning the Berlin Festival with Sense And Sensibility (actually an Anglo-American production), Cannes with Mike Leigh's Secrets And Lies (largely financed by the French) and further plaudits for Danny Boyle's Trainspotting, Michael Winterbottom's Jude and Peter Greenaway's The Pillow Book.

There was one odd exception — Danish director Lars von Trier's brilliant Breaking The Waves, made in English in Scotland and starring Emily Watson, quite brilliant in her first major screen role. But the huge success of Trainspotting, which outdid all but the biggest Hollywood blockbusters in Britain, and Sense And Sensibility, which did similar business with a rather different audience, shouldn't blind anyone to the fact that it is still far too difficult to get British films distributed properly in their own country.

If you look at the year's superficially healthy British box-office figures, you'll find that the six most popular Hollywood movies took well over 50 per cent of the money. Not a good sign. When Independence Day gets 450 prints in Britain alone and Secrets And Lies only 30, there is clearly an imbalance of some sort.

Lottery money and increased production funds are not enough. Distribution and exhibition have to be seriously addressed. They almost certainly won't be, whichever government is installed next year. Nor will the censorship furore that caused David Cronenberg's Crash to be banned — we haven't heard the last of that yet.

Flies in the face of adversity

Lynn MacRitchie meets an artist challenging the scientific establishment through her watercolours

CORNELIA Hesse-Honegger makes watercolour paintings of insects. They are meticulous and beautiful, but are they scientific data or works of art — and what difference does their definition make to how we, the viewers, respond to them?

The reasons these questions cluster unresolved about her work is because she paints insects which she believes have been deformed by exposure to radiation around nuclear power plants. Rejected as evidence by scientists, her work is now gaining international recognition on the fine art circuit.

Her pictures are intended to tell a story — but the interpretation of that story has differed violently depending on the context in which they have been seen. A professional scientific illustrator who has spent the past 25 years working in the Department of Zoology at the University of Zurich, she began her independent insect studies shortly after the explosion at Chernobyl in 1986. She specialised in painting the mutations suffered by fruit flies exposed to huge amounts of radiation in laboratory experiments. After Chernobyl, she felt "the whole of nature had become a laboratory". During her vacation, she visited Sweden, which had suffered high exposure to radioactive fall-out. There, as well as damaged insects, she also found plants which had changed colour or had deformed leaves.

She showed her paintings and the insect specimens to some of the scientists with whom she worked. "Nobody had any interest. One said it could not be fall-out. One said I should see a psychiatrist because anyone who went looking for deformed bugs must have a psychological problem." The embarrassment of her scientist colleagues, when confronted with her findings, made her determined to continue. "I am not a scientist, but the scientists were not doing this work," she told me. "It seemed I had been given this burden, I had to take it, to work it out . . ."

So she decided to work from her instincts, to do what her emotions told her was right. She began what was to become a global pilgrimage, collecting and painting specimens of bugs from the vicinity of nuclear power plants throughout Europe and the US.

She wrote and illustrated two articles about her findings which were published in a Swiss Sunday newspaper. She said exposure to even low levels of radiation such as occur around nuclear power plants might cause genetic damage. The bugs she *found* had feelers missing, wings deformed and bodies misshapen. While some mutations, of colour for example, could be caused by things such as pesticide sprays, the asymmetries she recorded suggested morphological change, caused by genetic damage.

A scientist who knows Hesse-Honegger's work and has herself studied the (proven) effects of radiation on conifers at Chernobyl urges caution, however. "There is always difficulty in proving whether morphological change is due to radiation exposure or to the normal evolutionary process," she says. "There would have to be controlled experiments, comparing exposed groups and control groups."

The Austrian Minister of Culture invited Hesse-Honegger to show in Vienna, and her work has now been seen throughout Europe. Jon Bewley, director of Locus +, the art organisation which brought her work to England, first saw it, he recalls, "in an Italian fashion magazine". As soon as he saw her pictures, they fitted so well with the aim of Locus +, to show artists' work dealing with contemporary issues, that he went straight to Zurich to invite her to exhibit. "Perhaps artists dare more . . . the art world goes further in proposing analytical models of society," Hesse-Honegger observes.

She, too, has had to dare to continue her work, and, listening to her, the strain is evident. Lecturing in Oxford she came across as angry, emotional. She has learned to mistrust, almost despise, the scientific establishment which is still her professional base. "Scientific truth is only one way of describing complex reality," she said. "The scientific model is determined by liberal intellectuals, mostly men . . . even if a study is made according to traditional scientific methods — who decides whether a question is important or not? Truth is only measured by actual human standards . . ."

Earlier, I had asked where all this was leading her. "I have no idea. I just do my work," was the reply. She is currently making a study of the Swiss canton of Aargau where there are three nuclear power plants and one research plant. She claims to have discovered a rate of disturbance in insects rising to 15.3 per cent near the plants.

"Disturbances happen all the time, of course, but not in the patterns I have observed. The highest damage is around the three plants and the prevailing wind direction from them . . ." It will take 18 months to complete the 40 paintings: each one takes one and a half weeks. "The time is right to do it. Ten years have passed since Chernobyl. In 1987-88 they said only 30 people died — they can no longer get away with statements like that."

In April this year, on the tenth anniversary of the explosion, an article in the magazine Nature noted that scientists examining families in the path of the radioactive plume from Chernobyl have found the first evidence that radiation damage to one generation could be passed on. Yuri Dubrova of the Vavilov Institute in Moscow, and Sir Alec Jeffreys, the British pioneer of genetic fingerprinting, found that genetic mutations occur twice as often in children of parents exposed to the fallout. "To our great surprise we did indeed find an effect at really low doses of radiation," observed Sir Alec.

Hesse-Honegger's insect studies may yet prove to have been created with the prophetic insight of the artist.

Hesse-Honegger uses art to show how radiation has led to genetic damage in insects

After Chernobyl; paintings by Cornelia Hesse-Honegger is at the University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford until January 10. The Future's Mirror, paintings from the Aargau series, is at Tullie House, Carlisle until January 19

Irish nostalgia stirred by a tornado of hymns

MUSIC
Peter Lennon

SAINT Ignatius Loyola could not have put it more jesuitically. "The record expresses the faith of the people, not the faith of the Church or the clergy," said John Kearns, attempting to explain the staggering success of his Faith Of Our Fathers CD, a collection of Catholic hymns that went straight to number one in the Irish charts.

With 35,000 copies sold in the first week, and total sales now at 60,000, the CD is heading for quintuple platinum by Irish standards. Now Faith Of Our Fathers is steaming towards a performance version in January at The Point in Dublin — the gargantuan venue of last year's Eurovision Song Contest.

Initially it was thought that the success of the record might be due to the tasteful Gregorian chanting of the monks of Glenstal Abbey, who appear three times.

But the monks' stately warbling has frequently been recorded. It is the 17 lusty hymns, saturated in piety, patriotism and xenophobia — such as To Jesus Heart All Burning, Faith Of Our Fathers, Hail Glorious St Patrick — to which the public is responding.

Once again Irish Catholics' heroism before persecution "in spite of dungeon, fire and sword" can be celebrated. They can lose themselves in gruesome notions of salvation — "Deep in Thy wounds, Lord, hide and shelter me" — and they can put their divided country back in the tender care of a Welshman, glorious St Patrick.

The publicity frankly identifies what is being evoked: "De Valera's Ireland . . . the passion of the GAA . . . the unique position of the Church in every aspect of Irish life of the 1940s and 1950s."

De Valera's Ireland, with its oppressive film, book and newspaper censorship, was a country that had put the outside world in quarantine. The Gaelic Athletic Association carried xenophobia to the demented lengths of forbidding its members (currently three-quarters of a million) to play "foreign games" (soccer, rugby, cricket etc) or even look at foreign games.

As for the Church, at a time when its congregation sang of heroically defending their faith "in spite of dungeon, fire and sword", the only persecution taking place was being meted out by the repressive, all-powerful clergy, as recent revelations of institutionalised sexual abuse and sadism by priests, Christian Brothers and nuns have established. (By the end of last year, 13 out of 26 Irish dioceses had to contend with cases of child sexual abuse, alleged or proven. In March of this year it was the nuns' turn, with cases of Gothic cruelty in orphanages.)

So is this phenomenon the fruit of subterranean manoeuvring by the Church to tap the loyalty of the faithful and win them back? Curiously, the clergy had nothing to do with it — at the outset at least.

"From the beginning," said John Kearns, a 37-year-old Dublin mortgage manager whose idea it was, "our intention was, I should not say to remove it from the Church, but to keep it separate from the Church."

He got the idea when he went to Mass one Sunday evening this spring and found the congregation singing the old hymns. These have long been superseded by inept attempts at swinging hymns, which get a very lukewarm reception. Kearns went looking for a record of the old hymns and was astonished to find they had never been recorded.

When he put his idea to five Dublin record companies, they thought it was "lunatic" for modern Ireland. So with five other businessmen, and later a deal with Irish television, he launched his CD. And the pious tornado struck.

The hymns have been given classy treatment: a 51-piece orchestra, drum rolls, harp and glockenspeils; Frank Patterson, tenor, Regina Nathan, soprano.

Although superficially the affair bears all the hallmarks of fundamentalist hype, it is not. Neither is it commercial hype: the promotion was modest. The CD's success was clearly consumer-driven. There was a huge untapped market. Some people are buying half a dozen copies at a time to send to family abroad.

The great debate in Ireland is whether this is a religious revival — which alarms those who hoped a repressive Church had been, appropriately, brought to its knees — or just nostalgia. John Kearns and his partner, Bernard Bennett, also in financial services, are adamant that it is uniquely about nostalgia.

"It reminds people", Bennett said, "of a simple time when you hadn't got all the things that are being talked about now — a purer, easier time for people."

The difference is that in those times, those good old days, the horrors that we are only now discovering were actually happening. "But they were not in the public domain," Bennett said, steadfast to Jesuit tradition.

The Catholic clergy have even taken to recommending the CD from the altar

Rather than nostalgia, a better word to describe what is happening is addiction. This looks like a convulsive, and genuinely spontaneous, reaching-out by generations hooked on religion who, betrayed by their Church leaders, were obliged to go cold turkey on their spiritual habits. They were gasping for a fix of the old purities.

"An association with the Church or hierarchy would actually detract from the appeal," Kearns said.

So the country is performing the interesting intellectual gymnastic of singing hymns while pretending this has nothing to do with religion. Or at least the nervous promoters are wary of having the clergy on their side.

But inevitably the clergy are getting in on the act: recommending Faith Of Our Fathers from the altar, referring to it at funerals. In the maternity ward of Hollis Street Hospital, it is played all day.

Now the CD is heading for The Point, Riverdancing old-time religion back into fashion.

Faith Of Our Fathers, RTE CD 198, IR £14.99

With a bullet in his head

Phil Baker

The Night in Question
by Tobias Wolff
Bloomsbury 211pp £15.99

WHEN so much short fiction is about catching varieties of absence, or precise shades of grey, Tobias Wolff writes stories where things really happen. After the "twist in the tail" stories of the notorious O Henry and others, people are wary of the muscular short narrative. But it doesn't have to be too gimmicky or unsubtle, as Wolff shows in this powerful new 15-story collection.

Like a bad dream, Mr Gold watches a dog attack his little daughter. He drags it off, but the police aren't interested. The dog was on a long chain — "The Chain" is the title — and its owner's prosperous house is a place where "the law was among friends". Instead Mr Gold turns to his cousin, who is only too keen to fix the dog. So things are fine, until a dude with a BMW and "SCUSE ME" licence plates damages the cousin's car. Then careful, law-abiding Mr Gold owes a favour in return.

Wolff's stories often unfold from a strong central idea or situation. An obituary writer is fired for filing the obituary of a man still alive. The man magnanimously invites him for lunch, and they fall to arguing about the worthwhile life. ("You can lead a good life without being a celebrity," says the self-regarding Mr Givens. "That's true", says our all-American obituarist, "but it's kind of a little person's *truth*." *But who could have reported Givens dead?* As lunch goes on, we develop a strong suspicion.

In "The Other Miller", a soldier named Miller is told his mother is dead. He is laughing inwardly, glad to be given a spell of compassionate leave; he knows it must be the other Miller, who often gets his mail. Wolff is too canny to say if he is right or wrong — it isn't such a simple twist. Elsewhere the hidden cargo is desire, with overeating and theft as its metaphors, or varieties of willing acquiescence, whether dressing up as a maid or being manoeuvred into buying a used car.

Character study is at the centre of his narratives, like the schoolmaster who prides himself on making a difference to his pupils by countering the easy lies of the world. But when he makes a drunken fool of himself and gets a kicking for it, everybody at his school assumes he has been *mugged. He doesn't contradict* them. More than that, they assume he's been mugged by blacks. "It was dark," he says, trying to fudge the issue, "I couldn't see them." Wolff's range — generic, tonal, stylistic — is remarkable: even within the same story, which is more usually a recipe for disaster.

A book reviewer is in a bank during a robbery. "The stern, brass-knuckled poetry of the dangerous classes," he sneers at the robber's threats, before a gun under his chin forces him to admire the painted ceiling, "even worse than he remembered, and all of it executed with the utmost gravity." Only the robber's ammoniac bad breath makes him realise the situation is serious, and suddenly a bullet in his brain makes his life "pass before his eyes": a phrase we're told he would have abhorred. But the quality of flashbacks makes the situation something more *than gimmicky, and it gels.*

Why should Wolff have it in for book reviewers, who have generally agreed he can do no wrong? Perhaps it is slightly crude to underscore ironies, or to reflect a main point in the title ("geddit?"). And perhaps Wolff's narratives are vulgarly red-blooded for the grey fictioneers. But they are remarkable by the standards of contemporary US short fiction, a world alluded to in here as "a few stories in literary journals that nobody reads, including me". These are stories you actually want to read.

The Night in Question is published by Bloomsbury at £15.99

This writer's life

Master storyteller Tobias Wolff started off inventing his own past. Now he makes up other people's.
By **Robert Winder**

IF THE American writer Tobias Wolff has some sort of genius for making things up, it might be because he started young. Desperate to escape a bullying stepfather, he nicked some official stationery and forged applications to several exclusive private schools. As he stroked the facts, awarding himself straight A-grades and an impressive athletic career, he tasted for the first time the flavour of authentic fiction.

"I could afford to be terse and modest in my self-descriptions," he wrote, "knowing how detailed my recommenders were going to be, I wrote without heat or hyperbole, in the words my teachers would have used if they had known me as I knew myself." It worked: he won a scholarship.

It would not be true to say he then forged on with never a backward glance: in his two award-winning memoirs (This Boy's Life and In Pharaoh's Army) he has looked back — without heat or hyperbole — as intently as any modern writer. He is probably (perversely) better known for autobiography than for fiction. But that early plunge into storytelling made a big splash. His collections (The Night In Question, his latest, is the third) quiver with the awareness that everything in life is a story. They snap open, pulling you in fast, usually in one sentence: "Gilbert saw her first . . . Brian Gold was at the top of the hill when the dog attacked . . . It began while she was at work."

People tell stories to each other, and to themselves. Sometimes *(often) they get muddled, or lose* the plot entirely. At one point in the new book, a soldier in Vietnam learns a bitter truth. Each of the tales he has told himself turns out to be false. He never thought he was the kind of man who would walk past begging children and feel nothing, but he is. He never thought he would visit prostitutes, but he does. He does not see himself as a whiner and a shirker, which is what he has become. He clings to the idea that he is, at least, the kind of man who would do anything for a pal, but he soon bumps into the fact of that matter too.

Wolff is a connoisseur of such turning points. "To some degree or other," says Wolff, leaning forward into another book tour, "I think all of us attempt to occupy a particular position in the world. And we feel nevertheless that this is a false position. So we're always creating a place for ourselves that another part of us doesn't believe in. There's a tension there, and for some people there are flashpoints that make it unendurable."

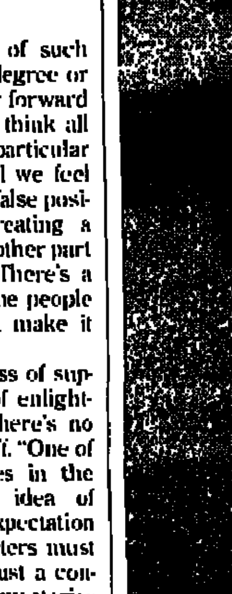
He is not in the business of supplying gratifying bursts of enlightenment at such times. There's no tap-dancing; no showing off. "One of the conventional tyrannies in the US," he says, "is the idea of epiphany. There's the expectation that at some point characters must see the light. Often, it's just a conventional move. I think in my stories the possibility of that experience is there, but the characters often decline to have it.

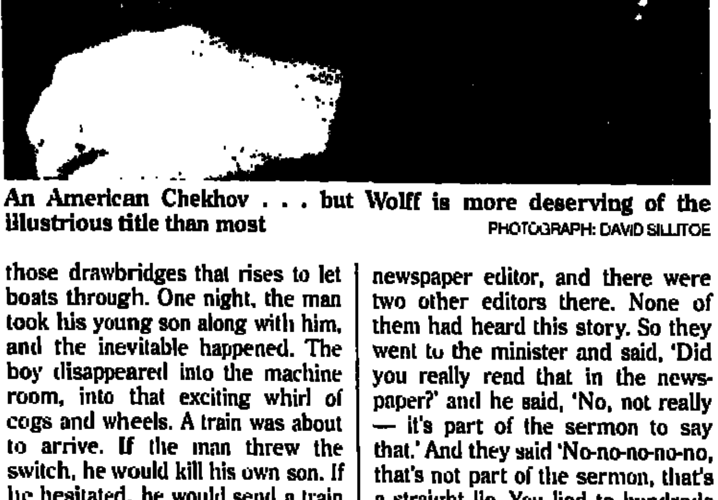
"The 19th century allowed you to fix on the horrors of the world, the injustice outside yourself. But it doesn't shine the light inward the way modern fiction does."

This is not necessarily the sort of conversation you would expect to have with Wolff. He has led a melodramatic life, and surely has a fund of flashy stories to tell. He grew up in a house of some cruelty, and tried most things in response: violence, theft and evasiveness of all kinds. As an 11-year-old he agreed to become a Catholic so long as he could change his name to Jack. When he enrolled in private school on false papers, he called himself Tobias von Anselm-Wolff III. He joined the army, toured Vietnam, and then became a Rhodes scholar at Oxford.

He taught a controversial course on pornography in an American university (Wolff is no one's idea of a misogynist, and he was rather piqued by the furore). And so on. *Apart from anything else, he is one of* very few people who have watched their own childhood on a cinema screen (in the film version of This Boy's Life) with Robert De Niro playing the bully: "Oddly enough, the scenes that shook me were the ones they invented, which turned out to be true". Yet what he really talks about when he talks is storytelling.

The flip side of his own fluency is an alertness to fraud in others. One of the most dramatic works in the new book is based, apparently, on a real incident: it was in all the papers. It concerned a railwayman on one of





An American Chekhov . . . but Wolff is more deserving of the illustrious title than most
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID SILLITOE

those drawbridges that rises to let boats through. One night, the man took his young son along with him, and the inevitable happened. The boy disappeared into the machine room, into that exciting whirl of cogs and wheels. A train was about to arrive. If the man threw the switch, he would kill his own son. If he hesitated, he would send a train full of people plunging to their death. What should he do? He was a faithful bible-reader. He recalled the precedents: Isaac putting his trust in the Lord, God himself offering up *his only son. His soul swelled with* faith. He knew what had to be done.

This was the version Wolff heard. He didn't believe it, and quite right too: it has all the trappings of urban myth. But it was served up as the gospel truth. "It was at a cultural festival," he says. "A woman told me about a protestant minister who gave this sermon which I had heard when I was a kid. He said he'd read it in the paper — they always say that. But people took it seriously, and were horrified, horrified. It made a tremendous impression on everyone.

"But this woman's husband was a newspaper editor, and there were two other editors there. None of them had heard this story. So they went to the minister and said, 'Did you really read that in the newspaper?' and he said, 'No, not really — it's part of the sermon to say that.' And they said 'No-no-no-no-no, that's not part of the sermon, that's a straight lie. You lied to hundreds of people and disturbed them.'

The minister didn't get it. He'd clearly been taught how to tell the story in bible college or whatever. It brought home what had been eating at me about that story: how manipulative it was, how brutal, the idea of God that lies behind it, everything."

In the book the story comes out as a conversation between a brother and a sister: a conversation that charts the hummocks of manipulation and dependency that lie between them.

It is typical Wolff, simultaneously easy and deep. The real difficulty between the brother and sister concerns their father, so the sermon is a story-within-a-story-within-a-story. It sounds tricky, but Wolff's composure never falters. Perhaps it is all that soldiering: when he has a story in his sights, his hands do not shake.

Like his friend, the late Raymond Carver, he adores Chekhov, and Wolff still talks about his hero with the eagerness of someone who's just discovered something: "What do I like about Chekhov? It's hard to say what I don't like. I like his unideological morality. He's very funny, and never moralistic. He writes about the difficulties of choice — his people are sculpting themselves with their choices. They're not completely determined by circumstances, though you do feel the weight of those circumstances very heavily, more so than in Tolstoy, say, who gives more credit to human agency than Chekhov does. But then Tolstoy also had this romance about the peasantry which Chekhov didn't have — couldn't have, because he was from there, his grandfather was a freed serf.

"Actually, Chekhov has a wonderful sentence about Tolstoy in a letter: 'Peasant blood runs in my veins, so you cannot astonish me with peasant virtues.' I love that. He was clear-eyed about everyone in that way, he had a discernment of the power relations between men and women, he saw beyond the glaze of custom. And what invention! He came up with motions between people that identified the differences between them. He did it without an ounce of sentimentality and he did it time and time again — there are 600 stories."

He clearly writes according to the precepts he most admires. Quite a few writers have been hailed as the American Chekhov. Not many carry the banner as confidently as Wolff himself. He makes things up and makes them seem real, while narrating his own multi-story life as if it were a novel.

Writers don't usually like being compared to even great predecessors — it seems to put a dent in their singularity. But Wolff himself doesn't mind the comparison one bit. When I mentioned, tentatively, that his stories had put me in mind of Chekhov, he didn't seem to mind at all. "Well, I'll be damned," he said, for all the world as if the thought had never occurred to him, "I'll be damned."

From biographies to flights of fancy, critics and writers dwell on their favourite titles of 1996

It never rains but it pours

William Trevor

"He gets no further than Wednesday", they said once upon a time in Norfolk when they meant he wasn't the full shilling. In the town of Tuam, among the young, a church is a pineapple, £10 a brick, and chips are banners. In Ayrshire if you're bruised you're hashed, if you're bloody you're jurmumbled. "He wasn't drunk exactly, only a little disguised," they may still say in Kent. Certainly, within easy memory, I've been given Moll Dole — the rough side of the tongue — in County Wexford. I've pleached, garbled and repeatedly been banjaxed. So, I imagine, has Diarmaid O Muirithe, whose **The Words We Use** (Four Courts Press, £6.99) is a delight from start to finish. Frank McCourt has a way with words too. A retired New York schoolmaster, he was brought as a child to the slums of Limerick in the bleak 1940s by parents who had emigrated to America and failed there. Boozy father, pious mother, pompous priests, drenching rain: it's that same terrible Irish sorrow, quite unrelieved in a moving and remarkable memoir, **Angela's Ashes** (HarperCollins, £16.99).

Isabel Fonseca

In **Savages** (Macmillan, £16.99) Joe Kane tracks the elusive Huarani *Indians and their struggle for survival* in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Helena Drysdale's visit as a student to pre-revolutionary Romania, her innocent dalliance with a man called "George", his disappearance and her return a decade later are captured in **Looking for George** (Picador, £6.99), where she grippingly relates not only what happened to him but what has become of that doomy and beguiling country. Adventures of another kind are to be found in **Christopher Isherwood's Diaries: Volume I** (Methuen, £25), edited by Katherine Bucknell. Starting on the day in January 1939 that he set sail for America with Auden and taking us up to Santa Monica in 1960, Isherwood's intimate chronicle — visited by just about everyone you've ever heard of — is a compelling mix of perspicacious cultural criticism, sharp, often funny observation about people and places, and good old gossipy glamour.

Lucretia Stewart

Hermione Lee's **Virginia Woolf** (Chatto, £20). Essential reading for any writer or would-be writer. Even if you think that you dislike biographies and/or Virginia Woolf, this book will change the way you think about life and its relationship to art and literature. A terrifically inspiring read. **A Sport and a Pastime** by James Salter (Random House US, $12.50). As far as I know, this perfect, small novel has never been published in the UK; choosing it as a book of the year may therefore seem like the worst kind of perversity and pretentiousness. But of all the novels that I have read this year, it is the most extraordinary and exciting. It has made my year, coloured it and given me an ideal to aspire to. The story of an intensely sexual affair between a Yale drop-out and a French shop-girl in provincial France, it has an enviable freshness and rich sensuality.

Francis Wheen

My favourite book of this year, as every year, is Laurence Sterne's **Tristram Shandy** (now available in an excellent Everyman edition). But 1996 brought a bonus for Shandy-guzzlers in the form of Martin Rowson's comic-book version of the great novel (Picador, £15.99), adorned and embellished with many deft curlicues of his own. I should also mention two important biographies that deserved more attention than they got — Nicholas Murray's **Life of Matthew Arnold** (Hodder, £20) and Patrick Humphries's **Richard Thompson: Strange Affair** (Virgin, £12.99), each of them a fitting tribute to an underrated English genius.

Hugo Young

Pleasure is the only test. **Independence Day** by Richard Ford (Harvill, £6.99 pbk) is the most resonantly enjoyable novel I've read *this year, interleaving the angst and* the quest for contentment of modern America with unfailing precision. It is nerve-touching, true, funny, long, with a gallery of plain American exotics. An unmannered Updike for the nineties. **Palimpsest** by Gore Vidal (Abacus, £9.99) is the wittiest exercise in serious gossip I've read for years. The memoirist's sardonic egotism and pitiless eye bring forth a subversive commentary on the public history of literary and political America in mid-century, starring Tennessee Williams, Anaïs Nin, J F Kennedy, and many others, but none more brilliant than unpatriotic Gore.

Linda Grant

Every year I read a novel and think to myself, I'll be lucky if I've read anything better than this by December. By April I'd found W G Sebald's **The Emigrants** (Harvill, £14.99; £8.99 pbk), an award-winner in Germany but outrageously ignored in Britain. The four fictional narratives explore the pain of Jewish exile and homelessness and, with the utmost delicacy and quiet tact, address what seems so mysterious to others, the suicide that overtakes survivors of the worst of traumas in old age. Another overlooked work was **Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present** by Robert Jan van Pelt and Deborah Dwork (Yale, £25), which examines the architectural plans for the camp and reveals that much of what visitors see today is a post-war fabrication.

Richard Williams

Five American songs: E Annie Proulx's **Accordion Crimes** (Fourth Estate, £16.99), a warm-blooded and joltingly eventful journey through the century in the company of a small Sicilian squeeze-box; the deceptively laconic jottings of Sam Shepard's **Cruising Paradise** (Secker & Warburg, £15.99); Jonathan Raban's forensic investigation of the Montana land-rush and its consequences in **Bad Land** (Picador, £15.99); vivid oral history from the likes of Homesick James and Little Milton in Paul Trynka's absorbing **Portrait of the Blues**, with photographs by Val Wilmer (Hamlyn, £20); and wonderfully rhyming images of dancers, trumpeters and just plain folk in **Roy DeCarava: A Retrospective** (Museum of Modern Art, New York, $60 hbk; $29.95 pbk), the work of an outstanding African-American photographer.

Michael Billington

I can never read enough about Orson Welles. David Thomson's **Rosebud** (Little, Brown, £20) was an indispensable complement to Simon Callow's magnificent biography: a compelling picture of Welles as a wayward, oddly prophetic genius based on the notion that Kane was essentially a self-portrait. What also emerged was Welles's nomadic solitude: nothing was sadder than the account of the aged, cash-strapped Welles dining with a young acolyte and looking enviously at a family eating happily together. John Lahr's **Light Fantastic** (Bloomsbury, £20) *was a fine collection of* New Yorker pieces that showed that dramatic criticism, given space and time, can be an art form in its own right. Most topical re-reading of the year was Matthew Arnold's **Selected Prose** (Penguin, £9.99), which reminded one that heedless individualism still prevails and that the Barbarians and Philistines are as present in Britain in the 1990s as they were in the 1860s.

Laura Cumming

Milan Kundera's **Slowness** (Faber, £12.99) is a brilliant argument for sensual indolence against the insanity of speed: eroticism versus Road Rage, the Enlightenment against the soundbite. Riveting ideas couched in an elegant and seductive novel; Kundera's first really comic book. Since the hardback version of Robert Hughes's great **American Visions** (Harvill £40) doesn't appear until May, console yourself with John Ralston Saul's **Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West** (Penguin, £13), which plots a thrillingly horrible route from the Age of Reason directly to Reagan, *Thatcher and, incidentally, David* Bowie and John Birt.

Beryl Bainbridge

She Must Have Known by Brian Masters (Doubleday, £15.99) This is a defence of the infamous Rosemary West, in which the author argues that, although culpable, Mrs West was not guilty of murder. It is to his credit that he dwells not on the sensational aspects of the case but rather on the legal ramifications. A provoking and moral book that searches for reasons, not excuses.

Tom Paulin

Anthony Julius's compelling, indeed lacerating critical study **T S Eliot: Anti-Semitism and Literary Form** (Cambridge, £13.95) was almost ignored after its publication, then a tidal wave of reviews began. Christopher Ricks's magnificent edition of early Eliot poems, **Inventions of the March Hare** (Faber, £30), brings into the light of day work which anyone who admires Eliot's poetry will be grateful for. Miroslav Holub's native Pilsen — its "infinitely crooked streets" — is evoked in **Supposed To Fly** (Bloodaxe Books, £8.95). Characteristically, Holub extracts lyricism from its denial. He's a genius. Censorship in his native Czechoslovakia during the 1970s prevented the publication of Holub's *books there. In Britain, indifference* sometimes works like a censor.

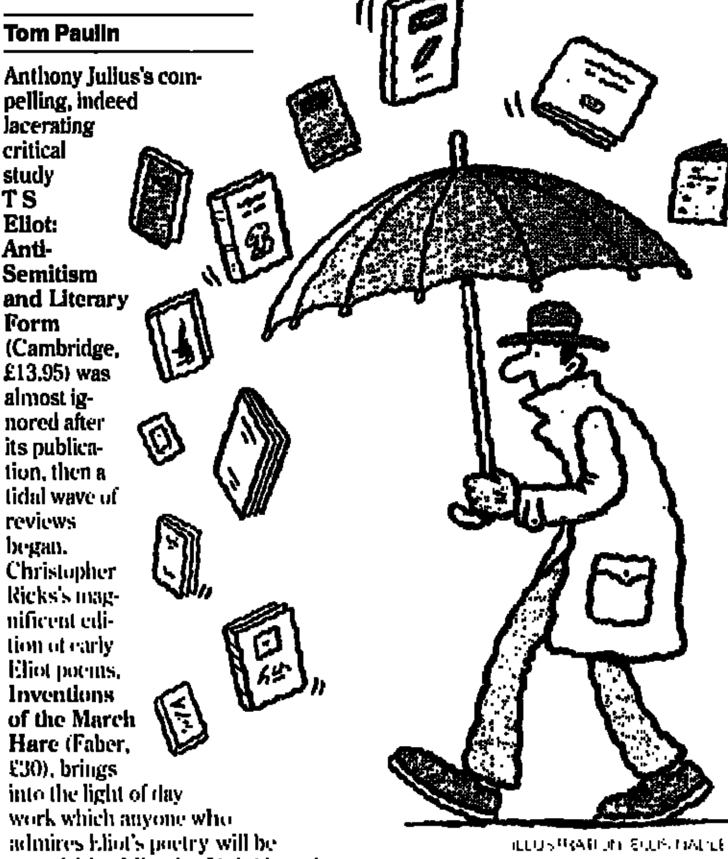


ILLUSTRATION: ELLIS NADLER

Beatrix Campbell

Worldly Goods (Macmillan, £25), a ravishing study of the Renaissance by that rather Renaissance, radical woman, Professor Lisa Jardine. **Reservation Blues** (Minerva, £6.99) by Sherman Alexie, whose book in memory of the legendary blues singer Robert Johnson is a supple, shimmering novel about music, stamina and sacred encounters in the desert. **Billie Holliday** by Stuart Nicholson (Indigo, £7.99 pbk), revisiting the reputation of the great singer as a musical revolutionary.

W L Webb

New Europe, new history? In fact, **Europe: A History** (Oxford, £25) is the story of the old, true Europe lost to sight during our long, politically induced amnesia, and now brilliantly recovered by A J P Taylor's brightest pupil, Norman Davies, another sardonic Lancastrian and master of the short sentence. This is Europe with its amputated Eastern half restored, remembering all the creativity, character and blood pumped through the Continent from Dresden and Prague, Budapest and Warsaw, St Petersburg and Odessa. Extending the story further east *and south, Neal Ascherson's* **Black Sea** (Vintage, £7.99 pbk) does for the Caucasus something of what Braudel's great work did with the Mediterranean, on a smaller scale, but with the same lovely combination of curious stories and grand connecting perspectives.

Colm Toibin

The best book of poetry published in Britain in 1996 was Ruth Padel's **Fusewire** (Chatto, £6.99). These are love poems and mediations on history narrated by an English-woman desperately in love with a man in Irish public life. All the cliches about the relationship between the two islands are subverted here. England longs for Ireland; Ireland is the strong partner. The novel I liked best was Patrick McGrath's **Asylum** (Viking, £16), *which also deals with the power of* passion. The story, which is about wildness and dark destruction, is told in a prose which is cool and eloquent, full of wonderful sentences and superb ironies. I also admired Anthony Cronin's **Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist** (HarperCollins, £25). Cronin writes with great insight not only on Beckett's Irish background, but on his strange and slow evolution as an artist.

John Ryle

How Many People Can the Earth Support? by Joel E Cohen (W W Norton, £22.50) is an even-handed and humane consideration of the big, worrying question. **The Spears of Twilight: Life and Death in the Amazon Jungle** by Philippe Descola (HarperCollins, £20), a magisterial work by a French ethnologist in the tradition of Claude Levi-Strauss, eclipses other South American rainforest travelogues. **A Glimpse of Hell**, edited by Duncan Forrest (Cassell, £12.99), a compilation of Amnesty International reports on torture, is horrible but necessary, not a bedside book. **The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing** (OUP, £20) edited by John Sturrock, performs a useful, difficult task with aplomb.

Before the fall: American fighter Gerald McClellan prepares for his fateful bout with Nigel Benn at the London Arena in February 1995

PHOTOGRAPH: VANESSA WINSHIP

Lucid truth of hype and hope in the ring

John Gaustad

THE judges of the William Hill Sports Book of the Year were primarily looking for good writing that illuminates something significant in the world of sport — either dealing with something which had not been treated at booklength before, or which threw new light on something we thought we already knew, forcing us to look at it again.

Dark Trade: Lost In Boxing (Mainstream, £14.99) by Donald McRae fell into the latter category and was a supreme example of its type, good enough indeed, to be named as the Sports Book of the Year for 1996.

McRae offers a lucid and penetrating assessment of professional boxing in the nineties. However, it is also the story of his quest to understand this dark and dangerous world.

The starting point is his childhood in South Africa, and his dawning awareness that boxers, and above all Muhammad Ali, could be an inspiration for both blacks and whites.

From his infatuation with Ali, which was stimulated by newsreel coverage of the Cleveland Williams and Ernie Tyrell fights, grew his fascination with the men who inhabit this violent arena. His focus throughout the book is on the boxers themselves, their thoughts and experiences.

Naturally enough he starts with Tyson, the "Baddest Man on the Planet" and the epitome of menace, and what makes his book so fascinating is his concern to discover what kind of men these are who choose such a dangerous occupation, to probe behind their malevolence.

His encounters with Tyson, as with all the others, are described with compelling honesty. Although, on his account, his questioning of them was often halting, and at times even maladroit, one has a very clear sense that somehow, to some extent, they trusted him, and for me this is what distinguishes his book.

While boxing is rife with both bad faith and hype, there's a clear sense that McRae's sensitive appraisals come very near to the truth, managing to reveal these boxers in their particularity. The one who comes up most often is James "Lights Out" Toney, another self-proclaimed "bad man". There is an astounding account of how McRae shared the tension of the final hours before the fight with Tony Thornton.

Then there's his loss to Roy Jones, his threat to kill his manager, and how he eventually recovered his fire.

Yet it's also a vivid picture of a sport grappling with profound change. McRae deals, after all, with the period when boxing went "showtime", the money became astronomical, and the deaths of Bradley Stone, Jimmy Garcia and James Murray and the tragic injuries suffered by Michael Watson and Gerald McClellan made the inherent risks undeniable.

Although McRae doesn't provide answers to these dilemmas, he does give a sincere account of his own qualms and self-questioning, and his sense that there are not any easy solutions.

Finally, he also writes really well. Apart from a few ill-judged scene-setter sentences about the sun burning high in a blue desert sky etc, his prose is nimble and sensitive, and although he describes lots of fights he largely avoids clichés and repetition.

I believe it is a very special book and a very worthy winner.

John Gaustad is chairman of the William Hill Sports Book of the Year judging panel

Getting to the heart of the action

Hell for Leather: A Modern Cricket Journey
by Robert Winder
Gollancz £17.99

War Minus the Shooting
by Mike Marqusee
Heinemann £15.99

ALMOST a year on from the cricket World Cup jointly hosted by Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan, two accounts about as similar in their approach to cricket writing as Boycott and Botham were in their approach to batting. Winder presents a wry, personal view of a competition dogged by controversy from its inception, that ended as it began, in farce. By contrast, Marqusee sets the cricket firmly in the context of the political and financial wrangling that threatened to bedevil the tournament. The fact that the competition flourished regardless of these numerous vested interests renders his detailed accounts of internal conflicts a distraction. — *Paul Kelso*

The Wrestling
by Simon Garfield
Faber £9.99

A SALTY history of the holds, headlocks, ricked backs, shattered knees, cysts, sores and showbiz that was British professional wrestling. Fired by a desire to discover what has become of the men and women who once attracted Saturday afternoon TV audiences in excess of 8 million. Garfield presents the story through the words of the protagonists themselves. A colourful cast of characters including Jackie Pallo, Mick McManus, Jimmy Savile, Brian Glover, and the mysterious Kendo Nagasaki tell a remarkable story of men crippled by the game, ruthlessly exploited by promoters, but beloved by the public. *PK*

Motty's Diary: A Year in the Life
by John Motson
Virgin £12.99

IN 1995 John Motson, the BBC's voice of football, and the man who's done more for the sheepskin coat than anyone, notched up his 25th year behind the microphone. To celebrate, football's archetypal trainspotter recorded his daily routine for posterity, and endearing stuff it is. Never guilty of taking himself too seriously, Motty's devotion to the game and his profession shines through, all the more so for the Pooterish quality of the entries. Charming, funny, impossible to read without affecting a Motty voice in your head. *PK*

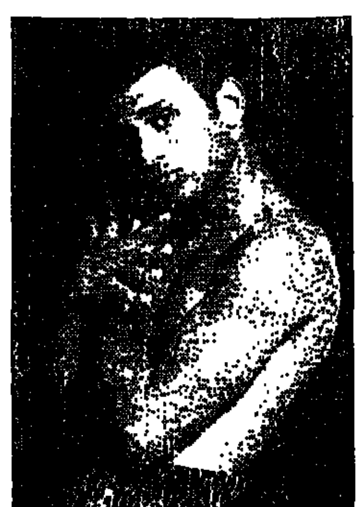
Little Girls in Pretty Boxes
by Joan Ryan
The Women's Press £8.99)

ONCE every four years, millions sit captivated by the seemingly effortless skill and grace of élite female gymnasts and ice skaters at the Olympic Games. Read this book, however, and you'll never be able to look at those frail, tiny figures performing feats of co-ordination and power without thinking of the suffering and sacrifice they have endured, and the hundreds who didn't make it, broken in their early teens by the demands of their sport. Unerringly, Ryan, one of America's leading sports journalists, presents a catalogue of what she describes as "legal, even celebrated child abuse", in which girls starve themselves (her research shows that 60 per cent of college gymnasts in the US suffer from eating disorders), risk osteoporosis, curvature of the spine, and untold psychological damage, at the behest of brutal, self-promoting coaches, and parents driven by misguided sentiment. *PK*

Dark Trade: Lost in Boxing
by Donald McRae
Mainstream £14.99

AN IMPRESSIVE and powerfully engaging survey of boxing over the past five years. McRae's work embraces the fall and return of Tyson, the egos of Eubank and Hamed and the tragedies that befall James Murray and Gerald McClellan. It is not descriptions of the fights that are remarkable in this book but the accounts of the schmaltz, the sleaze and the noble endeavour that are woven through boxing in about roughly equal amounts.

This is a worthy and important contribution to boxing literature at a time when squabbles and money mania are sapping the "noble art". — *Ben Clissel*

Naseem: prince of egos

Dalglish: My Autobiography
by Kenny Dalglish
with Henry Winter
Hodder & Stoughton £16.99

THE relentless onslaught of transparent and shallow soccer autobiographies is rarely punctuated by one that captures an audience beyond those who stockpile souvenir shop catalogues by their beds. But Kenny Dalglish's was always likely to be different. For a start, no one in British football matched his success as a player and a manager while resolutely communicating so little; he was at the heart of the tragedy at Heysel stadium and turmoil in his leaving of Liverpool; his sudden and dramatic departure from Blackburn came less than a month before the book was published. A revealing and occasionally moving portrait that mainly manages to resist the temptation to self-justification. *BC*

Bestsellers of 1996

1 Left Foot Forward — A Year in the Life Of A Journeyman Footballer by Garry Nelson (Headline, paperback, £5.99)

2 Everywhere We Go — Behind the Matchday Madness, by Dougie and Eddy Brimson (Headline, paperback, £6.99)

3 Football Grounds of Britain, by Simon Inglis (Collins Willow, paperback, £14.99)

4 The Complete Book of the Olympics, by David Wallechinsky (Aurum Press, paperback, £12.95)

5 Bad As I Wannabe, by Dennis Rodman with Tim Keown (Delacorte Press, hardback, £15.99)

6 Stan The Man by Stanley Bowles with Ralph Allen and John Iona (Paper Plane, hardback, £12.99)

7 Football Against the Enemy, by Simon Kuper (Orion Phoenix, paperback, £6.99)

8 A Good Walk Spoiled — Days and Nights on the PGA Tour, by John Feinstein (Little, Brown, paperback, £8.99)

9 The New Lords of the Rings by Andrew Jennings (Pocketbooks, paperback, £6.99)

10 Football Fanatic — A Record-breaking Journey Through English Football by Ken Ferris (Two Heads, paperback, £8.99)

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Cauldron of Troubles

Michael Mandelbaum

THE ELEVENTH PLAGUE:
The Politics of Biological
And Chemical Warfare
By Leonard A. Cole
Freeman. 284pp. $22.95

THE BOOK of Exodus records that 10 plagues were visited upon the ancient Egyptians, including vermin, locusts, hail and gnats. To this daunting list modern science has added an 11th: weapons of mass destruction. Foremost among these are nuclear armaments: large, powerful, controversial, the subjects of widely shared popular fears and long-running, highly visible international negotiations. Also included in this category are chemical and biological weapons, inorganic and live agents with lethal effects. These are the subjects of this worthy book.

Their family resemblance to nuclear weapons is not always apparent. They are not as powerful. A chemical or biological attack could not destroy a large city, although such an attack could kill a great many of the city's inhabitants. Nuclear weapons plainly belong to the history of warfare; they are the most powerful artillery shells ever created. Chemicals and biological munitions seem to belong more to the history of court intrigue, in which rivals eliminated each other by poison, or to the natural history of epidemics and plagues.

Plagues, in the Bible's account, are the work of the Almighty. During the Cold War nuclear weapons were largely, although not exclusively, the property of the planet's two most powerful countries, the United States and the Soviet Union. Here again, chemical and biological weapons differ from nuclear arms: They are the weapons of the weak. They have been called "the poor man's atomic bomb." It is easier to make or get them than to make or get nuclear weapons, and so they are more likely to be used. Indeed, unlike nuclear weapons, chemical weapons *have* been used since 1945, notably by Saddam Hussein in the 1980s against the Kurds of northern Iraq and the soldiers of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Eleventh Plague presents a series of essays on different episodes in the history of chemical and biological weapons: experiments conducted by the American military during the 1950s; the effects of the use of chemical weapons during the Persian Gulf War; and the debate about whether, given the difficulties of verification, it is wise to try to abolish chemical and biological weapons completely, as treaties concluded in 1972 and 1993 attempt to do. The book's overall purpose is to deliver two familiar but often ignored messages: It can happen in the United States, and it's later than you think. The same chemical weapons fired at Iranian soldiers could be used against American troops. The same kind of deadly nerve gas spread in the Tokyo subway in 1995 by a Japanese cult could be used to attack mass-transit passengers in New York.

There is no simple way to prevent chemical or biological attacks. A combination of treaties, restraints on the export of dangerous technologies, defensive measures, and monitoring is required. There is, however, no equivalent for chemical and biological weapons of the Cold War policy of nuclear deterrence, under which the United States prevented a Soviet nuclear attack by threatening a devastating nuclear assault in retaliation.

The book singles out for special attention one particular obstacle to the use of chemical and biological weapons: the stigma attached to them. They have been used, but less frequently than would be expected of weapons that are cheap and effective. Since the advent of chemical weapons during World War I, even nations engaged in cruel and desperate struggles seem to have avoided resorting to them in part because they believed that doing so was morally wrong.

Saddam Hussein was obviously not burdened with such scruples. But the revulsion these weapons arouse may have affected even him. It is possible that he did not use the chemical armaments in his possession in 1991 against American troops or Israeli civilians because he understood that the horror this would provoke might trigger terrible retaliation against him, perhaps involving even more powerful weapons.

Although it cannot guarantee their abolition, the worldwide revulsion that chemical and biological weapons evoke does contribute to limiting their use. That makes reinforcing the stigma an important international goal, and one method of doing so is publishing books like The Eleventh Plague.

ILLUSTRATION: CHRISTOPHER BING

Straight-Faced Sisters

Camille Paglia

THE PROSPECT BEFORE HER:
A History of Women in Western
Europe. Volume One 1500-1800
By Olwen Hufton Knopf. 638pp. $35

IN OLWEN HUFTON'S The Prospect Before Her there is a riveting vignette: The fishwives of Britain, Holland and France (who marketed what their husbands caught or bought) were "a vociferous bunch" — "coarse and unruly women" in the vanguard of political protest. To this day their name still describes shrill, fierce and formidable females.

Hufton's book offers a bounty of such anecdotal minutiae. English men too drunk to sustain an erection were said to suffer from "brewer's droop." German men "emasculated by their wives" were depicted as lions without claws. In 1652, Dutch Calvinist clergy condemned "goose-pulling tournaments where girls could fall over, showing more of their anatomy than was deemed modest." Venetian prostitutes identified themselves by wearing eye-catching, "high-heeled red shoes."

Court records of prostitutes arrested in London between 1733 and 1739 show that "many gave false names, the favourite being Miss Nobody."

Olwen Hufton is professor of history at the European University Institute in Florence and the author of five scholarly books, concentrating on 18th-century France. Her new book is the first of two volumes on women in Western Europe over the past 500 years. Here she covers the period from 1500 to 1800 and uses the technique of comparative social history to suggest parallels and interconnections among nations.

A work of this scale is not unprecedented. However, Hufton is less interested in the individual personalities of notable women and enormously expands the amount of factual data about the lives of working-class and middle-class women.

The Prospect Before Her is admirably written in clear, accessible prose. Except for a faddish locution in the first chapter title ("Constructing Woman"), it is unblemished by the kind of theoretical jargon or ideological bias that too often characterizes recent feminist and academic books. Though the dust jacket describes her as "the architect and first head of the Women's Studies Program at Harvard," where she briefly taught, Hufton seems to distance herself from academic feminism, which generally ignores or dismisses the biological sciences. She pointedly asserts, "In the early modern period, biology has to count for something. No one, for example, could plough a five-inch furrow in a condition of advanced or even early pregnancy."

Hufton's feel for the specific, gritty realities of everyday experience is the most appealing element of this book. She has a pungent way with words: "Fleas and polluted water are no respecters of persons."

A country girl aspiring to marry was lucky to be taken on as a local farm servant: "Here she might learn, in addition to cleaning and scouring pots and pans, skills such as pickling, malting, salting, preserving by smoking, drying, storing in grease or brine, working in the byres milking cows and goats and in the hen yard, hoeing vegetables, laying potatoes, weeding, haymaking."

For kitchen work also, "physical stamina" was crucial for toting coal, wood, and water. When porcelain tableware was introduced in the 17th century, scullery maids did vastly increased dishwashing chores: Before this, wooden or pewter platters had simply been "cleaned with a piece of bread."

HUFTON'S chapter on motherhood is particularly powerful: "In every noble household and in the lowliest cottage, a birth was a collective drama, and the room of the birth was living theatre." She stresses "the public character of the birthing process," which was "women's business" and "the main way in which female sociability and solidarity expressed itself."

Because animals' milk was not deemed healthful for infants, affluent children (including Jane Austen) were sent out to stay with a wet-nurse, who ideally had capacious, "box-shaped breasts." Tight swaddling of newborns was practiced from antiquity to the 17th century: Immobilization was thought to form and straighten the limbs. Infants were not permitted to crawl, since it would "allow mankind to adopt animal practices by going on all fours."

The book's later chapters, on French culture, are less successful. Oddly, as she moves into her own specialty, Hufton loses her sure sense of the general audience, most of whom will need to be more patiently briefed, for example, about the brilliant Parisian salons ruled by witty women of fashion. Except for a dramatic account of the march in October 1789 of 6,000 rebel women on the royal palace at Versailles, these chapters seem somewhat murky and fragmented.

There are some troubling sins of omission. Hufton's exposition has an excessive grimness, a disproportionate emphasis on the hardship of premodern life with little sense of its balancing assurances and satisfactions. While the externals are well-established, the soul is often missing from Hufton's portraits. Most seriously, she seems to lack sympathy for or deep understanding of religious feeling. We hear of misogynistic Bible stories, officious church edicts and charming folk superstitions, but Christianity's massive hold on the popular imagination is completely missed.

The period illustrations are excellent, as are the 97 pages of notes and topical bibliography. However, there is a dismaying concentration on publications of the last 20 years. Despite these problems, The Prospect Before Her is a solid, substantial, levelheaded work that belongs on the reading list of all modern history courses and that will provide edification and rewarding surprises for the curious, casual reader.

Non-fiction

Hardcovers

Witnessing America: The Library of Congress Book of Firsthand Accounts of Life in America 1600-1900, compiled and edited by Noel Rae (Penguin/Stonesong, $29.95).

THIS IS demotic history, the reminiscences of ordinary — and occasionally extraordinary — Americans about their occupations, recreations, wooing and other interests. Among the entries is self-appointed New York vice-buster Anthony Comstock's account of his vendetta against a bawdy house in which lewd dancing was the main drawing card. After witnessing the act himself, he mused, "Here is an exhibition given by women that beggars description — so gross that even a reference to it brings a blush. — Shall it continue? No! no! By all that is in us as men, no!" The ensuing criminal case against the exhibitionists was thrown out, however, because to prosecute it would have implicated the local police.

Aftermath: The Remnants of War, by Donovan Webster (Pantheon, $23).

WORLD WAR I ended nearly eight decades ago, but its specter is still very much with us. According to the French Interior Ministry, "12 million unexploded shells from that conflict still sleep in the soil near Verdun. Millions more await discovery in the World War I battle zones along the rivers Marne and Somme." Add to that the ordnance left over from World War II, and the explosive magnitude of the problem begins to emerge. "Everywhere in France — in potato field and orchards, under town squares and back porches — the fallout from two world wars has turned the soil into an enormous booby trap." Webster explores the bitter legacy of war around the world: in France; in Russia, where acres of bones recall the carnage of Stalingrad, in Vietnam, Kuwait, even Nevada, which still carries the radioactive legacy of the nuclear testing of the 1950s. Aftermath is a sobering reminder that the effects of war linger long after peace is concluded.

Dressed to Kill: James Bond, the Suited Hero (Flammarion, $45, distributed by Abbeville Press).

NOBODY epitomizes the cool style of master spy James Bond better than the original cinematic 007, Sean Connery. As Jay McInerney says in one of the essays in this book, "Connery's wardrobe in the first four films, shot between '62 and '65, would look perfect in almost any setting in 1995: the trim two-button suit in grey and blue with side vents, the white or light blue shirt with spread collar and the black silk knit tie." Dressed To Kill also features chapters on the world of 007 and on Bond's style secrets, and a plea for "The Return of the Suited Hero." Among the other tidbits presented here: that Bond's creator, Ian Fleming, was himself a clotheshorse, whose favorite bespoke suit was "a navy blue, three-button, three-piece in lightweight worsted." The idea for this book took shape when the tailoring firm Brioni of Rome was doing research on the evolution of James Bond's style, in preparation for outfitting Pierce Brosnan as 007 in the latest Bond flick, Goldeneye.

An original eye for wit

Willie Rushton

WILLIE RUSHTON, who has died aged 59 after complications arising from heart surgery, looked the very picture of an easygoing bon viveur. He had a well-marinated voice and a taste for loud checks to go with his figure. But he was never so uncomplicated. Among his many gifts was an extremely sharp wit which became all the more devastating when something annoyed him. He had the convictions of a satirist although he never made a point of parading them, and an acute eye for the ridiculous which was as easily applied to his acting and cartoon work as to the rapid fire of I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue, the BBC radio programme he contributed to for 20 years.

William George Rushton was born the son of a publisher. He was sent to Shrewsbury public school where he met and befriended Richard Ingrams. Also at Shrewsbury were the young Christopher Booker and Paul Foot. But it was Ingrams and Rushton who hit it off immediately and together they founded the Wallopian, a satirical version of the school magazine which was adorned by Rushton's early drawings and was to be a precursor of Private Eye. Rushton's other talents began to show at Shrewsbury, the first of which was acting.

His was the last generation to do National Service which he regarded as a privilege because the Army came to represent to him all that was absurd and posturing about post-war Britain. He was never one for respecting authority, but in the ordinary soldier, Rushton found a wit and resentment which he truly admired.

His acting break came in Spike Milligan's The Bedsitting Room. Kenneth Tynan described his performance as brilliant, a remark which Rushton hoped would be inscribed on his gravestone. Other parts followed in film, and TV, most notably in That Was The Week That Was where Rushton performed a weekly impersonation of Harold Macmillan.

Unlike Ingrams and Foot, he never went to Oxford, at least not formally, but he was up there often enough to see Ingrams and to help with the magazine Parson's Pleasure, which was to be the immediate forebear of Private Eye. They both drank copiously in those days and both subsequently gave up the booze, Rushton because he developed diabetes in the early 1980s. He lost weight and found to his delight that a teetotal life gave him a lot more time for drawing and commercial voice-overs. These made him a wealthy man.

His greatest pleasure was drawing, and in the early issues of Private Eye, founded by Ingrams, Booker and Rushton in 1961, it was Rushton's cartoons which supplied the magazine's distinctive look. He had a line all of his own and a fascination with incidental detail which made his covers for the Literary Review collectors' items.

Like his friend Peter Cook, who died last year, he had only to walk into the room for people to enjoy themselves. He was very funny but he was also generous with his own laughter and never felt the need to dominate a gathering. He was intensely private himself and once said: "I don't think because I appear on TV, it gives people the right to shout out to me in the street or pull me about in public." He felt for other peoples' privacies that had been invaded.

It is a testament to Rushton's extraordinary range of talents that so many in radio and newspapers, the theatre, publishing and particularly in Private Eye were shocked by the news of his early death. It was so unexpected. He was a big part of all their lives and they will miss his generosity and his wit.

William Rushton leaves a wife, Arlene, whom he married in 1968. They had three sons.

Henry Porter

William George Rushton, actor, author and cartoonist, born August 18, 1937; died December 11, 1996

Willie Rushton pictures himself as Cuba held by Fidel Castro

Wise man of Africa

Laurens van der Post

LAURENS van der Post, who has died aged 90, was a man of many achievements, public and private. He was an Afrikaner and, by long residence and cultural familiarity, also a European. He had been a soldier — and a prisoner-of-war who discovered and preached forgiveness for his enemies. He was a farmer who became a writer, a journalist and an internationally successful novelist and film-maker.

He was born in the Orange Free state, 13th of 15 children of a distinguished Afrikaner family and was brought up on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. At 17, he became a journalist in Durban. At 20, he first visited Japan, in the company of William Plomer and as guest of the magnificent Captain Katsue Mori, a mercantile officer whom van der Post protected from racial unpleasantness. Japan was to be more important in van der Post's life than he could have imagined, and he and Plomer both later wrote about that journey — with fascinating discrepancies in the reportage.

Thereafter, the pre-war period appears to have been difficult. Van der Post married Marjorie Wendt in South Africa in 1928. They had two children. He came to London, then returned to South Africa to work on the Cape Times, then came back to Britain. He also wrote his first novel, In A Province, which was published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1934. This was one of the earliest fictional indictments by an Afrikaner of what was to become apartheid; but van der Post had not yet come into his own. When war broke out, he immediately enlisted and was soon commissioned.

He served first in Ethiopia, then in the Western Desert and Burma, finally in Java, where he was captured by the Japanese, to be held for three years. It was the turning point of his life. The Seed And The Sower (1963) eventually became the film Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence.

The Dark Eye In Africa (1955), a meditation which he had begun to write before the war, signalled his renewed interest in the problems of his own continent. But van der Post's writings, so often autobiographical, cover only some of the episodes in his long life.

Eventually — long after the war had ended — he returned to Britain, quit the Army, set off again for Africa and for a new career as writer-explorer. In 1949, he married again to Ingaret Giffard, a Jungian analyst who introduced him to Carl Gustav Jung in Zurich. Jung became a lifelong friend

Van der Post's literary reputation took off with the publication of Venture To The Interior in 1952, his account of an journey to Nyasaland. The book continues to attract plaudits for its poetic sensibility and profound insights into Africa, even as it is criticised for its inflation of a simple central African journey. Van der Post never looked back.

In the 1950s he had made journeys to the Kalahari with spin-off television documentaries. These were later to attract criticism from anthropologists, though laymen better remembered van der Post's love of the doomed Bushmen.

Van der Post was also a man of public affairs, which he conducted privately. His contacts and friendships in southern Africa were considerable, as they were elsewhere, and this brought him roles in the dramas of the past 30 years, many of which still remain unreported.

He often chose to conceal his continuing fight against apartheid in its darkest days, just as he was totally discreet about his role as sage and counsellor to the Royal Family: that he was godfather to Prince William was the only public clue.

As the years passed van der Post's books became increasingly autobiographical, reflective and mystical. He followed events in South Africa intensely, and continued to be a frequent visitor: his sympathies — for Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, for instance — were rarely in line with current fashion, just as his opposition to sanctions did not assure him the approval of many Guardian readers. None of this should suggest that he ever had the slightest sympathy for apartheid: on the contrary, he was from his youth a passionate and instinctive enemy of racialism. But he was born a member of the Afrikaner Establishment and could never resign. He was for ever a White African, yet he spent most of his life outside South Africa.

He developed to a fine art a wonderful African gift for public story-telling. He became the wise old man of African — a Jungian and also universal — archetype, and as such he, and his memory, will survive the occasional sceptic and his few detractors.

He is survived by his wife Ingaret, a daughter, Lucia, and six grandchildren.

J D F Jones

Sir Laurens van der Post, writer, and explorer, born December 13, 1906; died December 15, 1996

Enemy of the ad men

Vance Packard

VANCE PACKARD, whose best-selling books of popularised sociology developed a powerful critique of America's post-war consumer culture and warned against the alarming influence of advertising, has died at the age of 82. His best-known book was The Hidden Persuaders (1957), a highly readable study of the use of psychology by advertisers exploiting the post-war consumer boom.

He drew heavily on Ernest Dicter's school of motivational research to show that advertisers were increasingly trying to target the consumer's sense of inadequacy, selling Campbell's soups not simply as nourishment, but as "good" food that echoed the comforts of the maternal breast.

Packed with anecdotes about the way Detroit marketed cars to men as if they were high-powered, barely tameable mistresses, the book made the pungent point that political candidates like General Eisenhower were beginning to be sold in a similar way.

In 1959, his book The Status Seekers was an intriguing study of that American class system whose very existence American political culture likes to deny. From the world of New England private schools to the pews of the Episcopalian church, Packard explored the WASP establishment in characteristically readable style.

The Waste Makers (1960) explored the new corporate device of planned obsolescence, of manufacturing products with a limited life and deploying marketing strategies that would lure consumers to buy the latest model.

His later books made less impact, as they began to criticise not only corporate culture; but the increasing self-indulgence of an American society that was getting hooked on hedonism. The Sexual Wilderness (1968) challenged the fashion for free love in a society thrilling to the easy contraception of the Pill, and stressed the social and personal utility of monogamous marriage.

He was essentially an old-fashioned American moralist, nostalgic for an environment that had disappeared traumatically in his own boyhood, when his father had to sell the failing family dairy farm in 1924.

He was born and raised in rural Pennsylvania, by a mother who gave up her school-teaching job to raise the children and who kept a strict Methodist household of frugality and temperance.

His father got a job in the agriculture school of Pennsylvania state university, where young Vance Packard went to college.

In 1952, he gave up journalism to write books full-time and moved to the rural retreat of New Canaan. He spent his summers in the similar idyll of Martha's Vineyard.

He became one of the most influential cultural critics of his day because he relished American abundance and prosperity, but wanted to enjoy it on his own terms, which meant recognising the dangers of abandoning the traditional verities of family stability and products that last a lifetime.

The phrase by which he is likely to be remembered is the conclusion to The Hidden Persuaders: "We can choose not to be persuaded."

Martin Walker

Vance Packard, writer, born May 22, 1914; died December 12, 1996

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
December 22 1996

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues that the failure of anti-racist laws and campaigns leaves Britain in need of a radical new approach to multiculturalism

Black looks and white lies

FORD MOTORS in Britain has (once again) been accused of tacitly condoning allegedly racist practices in the company. Or as my forthright black friend Godfrey, who used to work there, puts it: "They have been caught again with their pants down, pissing on blacks."

In February, Ford paid £1,500 to four black workers after it was discovered that their faces in a photograph used for promotional material had been replaced by images of white people. The company described this as an "administrative error".

Earlier this month, an industrial tribunal heard that although 40 per cent of Ford workers are black or Asian, most of them cannot get élite jobs as drivers with the truck fleet. This is because existing drivers have been keeping out black drivers by operating a relatives-first policy. The management chose not to intervene.

Ford got caught. Many, many other organisations in the private and public sectors are engaged in similar subterranean discriminatory practices. Most carry on undetected; others don't care. Even national newspapers, for example, recruit staff, columnists and commissioning editors largely through informal networks and (so I am told) at those frightfully exclusive north London dinner parties. No wonder that Britain still has fewer than 30 ethnic-minority staff journalists out of 5,000 and as yet no editors or regular commentators.

There is, thus far, one civil servant above Grade Five (and he is a race adviser), pitifully few judges, business board or quango members or hospital consultants, even though 25 per cent of health service doctors are from the ethnic minorities. Last year the Commission for Racial Equality backed individual complaints against local authorities, employment agencies, security and financial services and solicitors. Diane Abbott, the Labour MP, expressed it crudely, but she was right to point out the discrimination faced by long-serving black staff in the National Health Service. The Prison Service had to pay out a record £28,500 to a black auxiliary officer for injury to feelings. And the same attitudes can be found in the City, the Royal Mail, almost anywhere you care to look.

Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show that levels of unemployment among blacks, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain are three times higher than for whites. Other studies reveal that ethnic minorities are overtaking whites in educational achievements. You cannot win. Many of us — even die-hard socialists — made the difficult and expensive decision to put our children into top private schools believing foolishly that we would then bypass racism.

This year, a study showed many of these talented, bright children — my own son among them — had to face overtly discriminatory behaviour at Oxbridge interviews. Like many others, his surname provided some merriment and he failed to answer the question: "What makes you think someone like you can come here?"

Meanwhile, in the United States, we have just seen a particularly dramatic illustration of alleged racist behaviour by a large organisation. The oil company Texaco has just paid out more than $176 million to 1,500 past and present black employees to fend off a race-discrimination lawsuit after executives were secretly recorded using racially offensive expressions. It is the largest such settlement in the US. Peter Bijur, the chairman, who capitulated under media pressure and threats of boycotts by blacks, said on CNN that Texaco was just the "tip of the iceberg" of corporate racism.

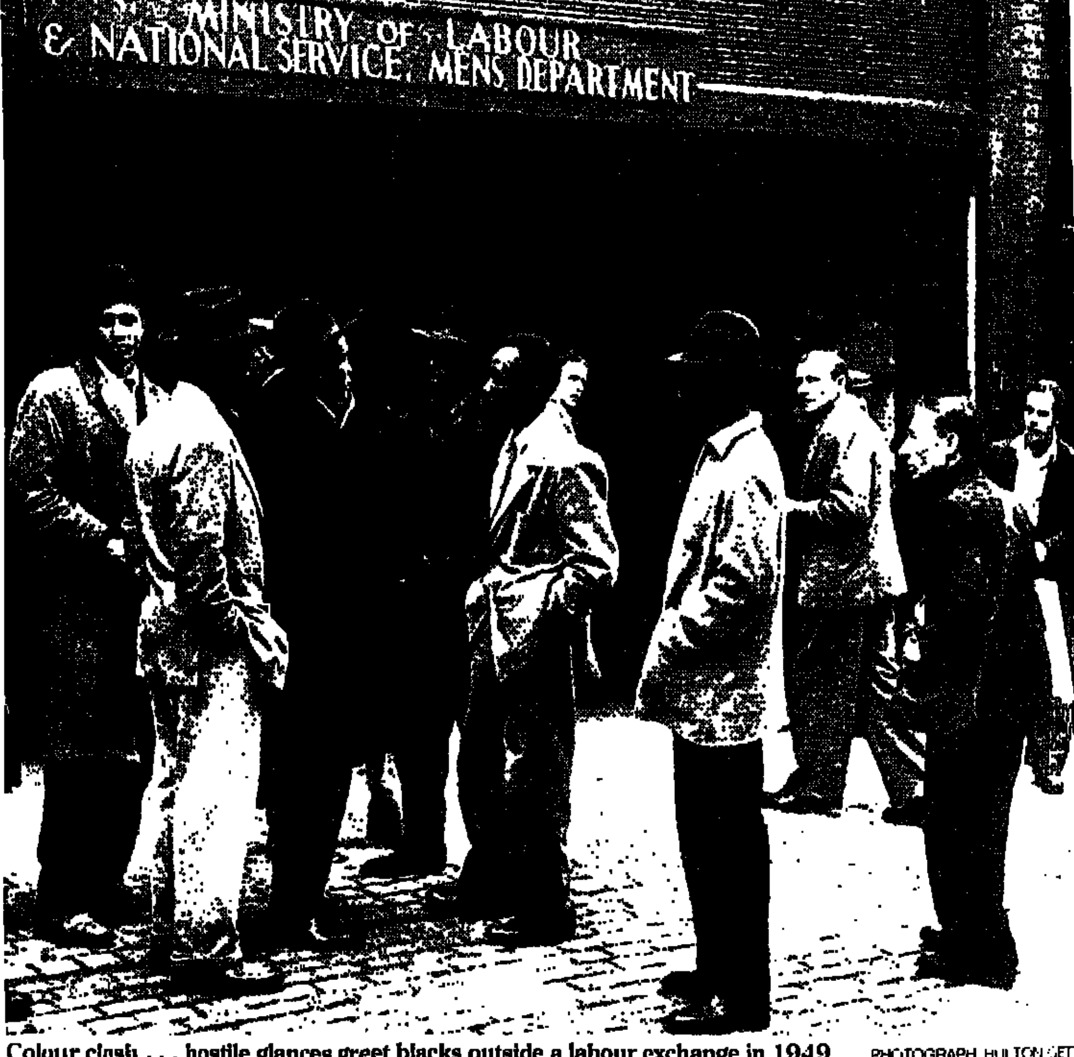
Most US blacks are now caught in a cycle of unemployment, deprivation, crime and violence. Hundreds of thousands are in prison. As the poorest inhabitants of certain cities, even if they do find work, their life chances are appalling. In Los Angeles, the annual income of those at the bottom of the pile — mostly blacks and Hispanics — is $6,821. The top fifth of these ethnic groups in the same city have average incomes of $123,098.

Thirty years or more after the civil rights movement, and race relations legislation in both countries, is this it? What does this say about race relations in Britain and the US? And most important of all, how on earth do those who have been cajoling, persuading, training, educating and threatening organisations to shape up for decades respond to this obvious manifestation of failure?

It is time now for a radical rethink on the equality strategies that have been promoted for so long that they have almost entered the food chain. In fact, one of the first actions taken by Texaco since its public humiliation has been to buy in "diversity and sensitivity" training. Other companies, such as Chase Manhattan and Columbia Gas, are scurrying around auditing their own ethnic profiles. We have settled too comfortably into the consensus that things will and can get better with policies, training, tougher and more effective laws. It is trying to crush a hard nut with tweezers. All this may indeed be necessary, but even they can only tinker with the system or get through some minimal changes. Some believe they can actually help to disguise racist attitudes and behaviour. The police are an excellent example of this.

Anti-racist training has been instituted at great expense by various British forces for over 13 years now. It has made no difference to the well-documented racism within the police force, the deaths of black men in custody or the lack of trust that exists between the police and black and Asian communities.

Both Ford and Texaco have already invested huge amounts of time and money in developing equal opportunity strategies. Texaco had an affirmative-action policy in place and special scholarship for blacks and other visible minorities. Ford was one of the first big companies in Briain to bring in equal opportunity training more than a decade



Colour clash . . . hostile glances greet blacks outside a labour exchange in 1949 PHOTOGRAPH HULTON GETTY

back. In fact, I worked then for a government-funded agency which was recruited to go into the Dagenham plant and provide this training.

I remember sitting in a circle, with a group of all-white supervisors who listened with indifference and/or contempt as I tried to explain the law and why equal opportunities was good for the company. They listened; then Bill, the one with very thick wrists and rock-hard face, slowly pronounced: "Look lady, I have nothing against coloureds. They work here, same as us. And good luck to them, I say. But they can speak English as good as you, they can try, but they will never be one of us. Never. They can never be British." These are the attitudes that underpin what is going on at Ford, Texaco and elsewhere. These attitudes can never be polished away simply with equal opportunity policies or even the more punitive legal machinery in the US.

PEOPLE like Herman Ouseley and Lord Lester of Herne Hill believe passionately that much more can be changed with real political will which has not been forthcoming from the present British government. In fact this has been yet another abysmal failure that one can freely attribute to the Conservatives. I fail to understand how so many of my Asian brethren can vote for them. Money must rot not only conscience, but the instinct for self-preservation. But even if we get a change of government which has greater political commitment, without other transformations this will be inadequate to deal with a problem which is so influenced by the changing social and economic landscapes that have overtaken both countries.

It is also now obvious that coercion or even economic threats are unlikely to shift hearts and minds. They may even make people more determined to discriminate or exclude, or join the backlash. This is certainly happening in the US. In November, California voted to ban gender and race quotas in government posts. As Maurice Franks, an American professor of law, wrote recently: "The civil rights movement, and the labour movement, became a model of social change in America: a model of organised demand, obdurate resistance and little meaningful change." In Britain, too, race equality work is more or less extinct in many areas.

If there is to be any lasting and real progress on race equality, we will need to make more of an effort to understand how complex the picture is and make a moral case for equality. Although the evidence of persistent racial discrimination is indisputable, unimaginable developments have also taken place.

Colin Powell is the most popular public figure in the US today. Middle-class blacks there are among the most powerful, influential and successful people of colour in the world. In Britain, Asian millionaires are commonplace as are highly regarded black individuals in broadcasting, entertainment and sports.

We will have to find a way to explain to people — especially white people who have lost out in these hard times — that the forces of progress and regression can coexist and that they do not cancel each other out. One mellifluous TV newsreader like Trevor McDonald does not herald springtime for all blacks.

Life is more unpredictable and volatile for everyone. Once there were enough low-grade jobs for blacks and equal opportunities did not mean a zero-sum game. Now it does, because of downsizing and because black and Asian people are not content to stay in their allocated places.

Middle-class white people are now facing real competition from ethnic minorities. The new "conservative" agenda on both sides of the Atlantic means that there is now a fashionable and convenient rejection of victimhood from those who were considered the natural constituency of support for minority rights. Vociferous and dangerous black and Asian separatists only make such disengagement easier. Without regaining the support of white liberals, the fight against racism is for ever lost.

WE NEED to re-define concepts, too, as a matter of some urgency. Multiculturalism has for too long meant everyone else but white English people. The British identity faces enormous anxieties because people feel it is under threat from Europe and from within by minority groups. These anxieties need to be taken seriously by ethnic minorities and the political leadership.

There is nothing in John Major's rather pathetic vision of a Britain full of cricket pitches and church-going maids on bicycles, but where is the alternative dream? One which includes and delights in the resulting impurity and diversity?

And finally, without a significant shift in attitudes, nothing real and lasting can be achieved. Professor Bhikhu Parekh, ex-deputy chairman of the Council for Racial Equality, is spot on when he says that what is now needed is "respect and recognition which go beyond equal opportunity and call for a profound change in white society's attitude to ethnic minorities".

It is only when this happens that we will be accepted as a part of the nation; as people who fought and died for it, who have helped to build it instead of being seen as interlopers making impertinent demands for privileges which are not ours by right. Then, maybe, that surly supervisor at Ford might just begin to understand why he should behave more fairly towards "coloureds".

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research, is the author of No Place Like Home (Virago), on the Ugandan Asian experience

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Rock 'n' roll on

THEATRE
Michael Billington

WE ARE often told that we live in a visual culture. Clearly the message hasn't got through to our young dramatists, who are utterly obsessed with language. The latest proof is Jim Cartwright's **I Licked A Slag's Deodorant** (Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London) which, running only 50 minutes, is a piece of word-drunk, jagged poetry about desolation and solitude.

Cartwright's play is tough and bleak. He presents us with Man and Slag, a helpless misfit and a crack-addicted whore. The Man is strangely drawn to Slag's world. He not only licks her deodorant but sits in her tatty pad with a stripper's scented bra over his eyes. But when he is slashed and beaten by her pimp and supplier, and left in the street with a bucket over his head, she takes him back home. They end up in a parody marriage with him living under the bed, amidst the fluff-balls and condoms, listening to her professional couplings.

What Cartwright is saying is not startlingly original: that people living at the extreme edge of solitude are drawn together by necessity. But he views society's discards without a hint of condescension but with an astonishing, almost negligent poetry. The play is primarily a linguistic experience in which Cartwright paints pictures through words: as the Man describes a corpse, "covered in dust and beetles", being removed from the upstairs room, or the Slag evokes her flat, "the carpet like an Indian takeaway", the images seem tangible, precise and resonant.

I've no doubt the play will be linked with other recent excursions into low-life desperation such as Shopping And Fucking or even the stage version of Trainspotting. Both, to me, smacked of deliberate shock tactics: there was an element of testing the audience to see how far you could go. But what distinguishes Cartwright's play is its sense of sadness and recognition of the crying need for company. If it has a fault, it is that it sometimes falls into patterned phrases: at one point, the Slag reveals her hatred of men by reeling off a racist litany of clients, starting with "kinky Chinks taking ages to come", that seems almost too rehearsed.

But Cartwright certainly proves that our young writers are devoted wordsmiths. His own production also achieves an exhilarating sensory urgency thanks to the uninhibited acting of Polly Hemingway as the aching Slag, and of Tim Potter as the Oedipal client clearly seeking mother-substitutes and prey to labial and olfactory obsessions.

A fascination with language also lies at the heart of David Schneider's The Eleventh Commandment at London's Hampstead Theatre, a first play by a young actor-comedian. The hero is a 30-year-old Jewish estate agent who, like Cartwright's protagonist, is mother-dominated and has difficulties with girls. But when he falls for an Ulster-born TV reporter and threatens to marry out, he breaks the titular commandment: "Thou shalt not give any posthumous victims to Hitler." In the end the play is a straightforward plea for Judaism to shed its obsession with the past and adopt a constructive attitude to inter-marriage.



Jeffrey Segal gives David Schneider the chop PHOTO: RICHARD MIDENHALL

Schneider writes, and plays the lead character, with obvious sincerity. But in his case the linguistic obsession manifests itself in a compulsion to round out every scene with a punchline as if we were watching a series of comic sketches. It's a quip-hungry play typified by the moment when the girlfriend, envisioning the possibility of mixed Jewish-Ulster Protestant children, dubs them Jaffa Oranges.

The play's saving graces are its liberal stance and the quality of its performance. Sheila Steafel is outstanding as the Jewish mum who argues, with passionate conviction, that marriage to a *shiksa* is a form of betrayal. Even when she pops up through the bedclothes, while the hero is strenuously trying to make love, she manages to retain a certain dignity.

Schneider has written a moderately funny message play. But you feel he often pursues the jokes instead of letting them come to him, and allows his love of word-play to dominate the action. Language is at its best, as Cartwright proves, when it grows organically from character and situation rather than being stuck on in impasto style: then it achieves the real potential for poetry.

The show's the thing

DANCE
Judith Mackrell

COLOUR and light play over the stark white set of Bunty Matthias's show Viewpoint like sunshine and moonlight over a tiny Greek village. The stage is dominated by two crenellated staircases, and when a peachy glow radiates behind them it's like dawn rising in a violet sky.

Moments later, a white noonday light etches their shadows into lines of steel, or a blue dusk suspends them in mystery. The lighting flicks again and a stormy purple charges the stage with electricity. This show at the Queen Elizabeth Hall is one of the best-designed in London.

Matthias and Annabel Haydn commissioned their set and lighting (from Wells Mackereth Architects and Mark Ridler) because they wanted to explore the relationship between architecture and dance. But for much of the piece the choreography's function seems solely to draw attention to the design.

The dancers glide up and down the stairs and flex into moves that echo the angles of the set. As the stairs are wheeled between positions, the dancers too perform their steps back to front or in reverse. They speed up or slow down in response to the lighting's mood changes, and only sometimes do they luxuriate in their own more curvy human shapes, or kick around in the empty spaces of the set.

Audiences with a passion for visuals may find that the shapes made by the dancers' bodies are enough to please. The performers are good-looking and the choreography has moments of deft composition. But as dance it is disappointingly empty.

With every line and gesture looking as if they have been calculated for visual effect, you suspect that all the choreography was created in front of a mirror. It rarely carries an emotional or erotic charge, and it rarely sings with its own silent music.



To the right . . . design wins over content PHOTO: HENRIETTA BUTLER

In fact, as the dancers dip and bend to Noel Watson's fashionable collage score (female vocals, Bulgarian women's choir and electric guitar), the effect is of people posing. Ultimately it feels as uncomfortable as trying to eat in an over-designed restaurant. You feel as if you've been stranded in a room where people's only purpose is to blend in with the decor — not to satisfy any messier human desires.

Works of art up for grabs

Kamal Ahmed on a rise in the number of art thefts

MORE than 2,000 works of art from some of the world's greatest artists, including Picasso and Rembrandt, are missing, many stolen, as criminals target the art world to launder money from drug deals and fraud.

A new report from the Art Loss Register reveals the enormous number of missing masterpieces and a rapid increase in art theft. This year the register has been notified of 1,400 stolen works of art and antiques a month, compared with 400 a month in 1993.

Picasso heads the list in terms of numbers: nearly 300 of the Spanish painter's works are missing, including the oil painting Ace Of Clubs and the watercolour El Christo De Montmartre, both stolen from galleries in Switzerland. Ace Of Clubs is valued at £500,000.

Close behind is Marc Chagall, the Russian-born expressionist. More than 200 of his works are missing. Other artists in the top 10 include Joan Miró, with more than 200 missing works, Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt, Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol, all with more than 100 missing paintings, and David Hockney, with 45 missing works.

Many of the paintings are priceless — Rembrandt's Storm On The Sea Of Galilee, stolen in 1990, was his only known seascape.

"I think that most members of the public would be shocked by the number of works of art by such noted people that are missing," said James Emson, managing director of the Art Loss Register. "There appear to be plenty of low-level dealers who are willing to buy without asking too many questions."

The register put together the report on the world's top 150 artists after approaches from Japanese banks, which are holding millions of pounds' worth of paintings taken as loan security from companies. Many of the companies have since gone bankrupt because of the country's recession and property-fraud scandal.

"It would be important for a bank not to be seen to be selling stolen art," Mr Emson said.

In the past year, police, insurance companies and loss adjusters have been inundating the register with details of items ranging from masterpieces such as Crying Lady With A Cat by Miró to pieces of silverware, furniture, jewellery, and fireplaces ripped out of stately homes.

The register has been involved in the recovery of £25 million worth of stolen art since it began operating in 1991, the bulk of it in the past 18 months.

Art thieves, often connected to drug-trafficking cartels or paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, may hold on to stolen works for many years before passing them to trusted dealers. The items are then sold on through a web of agents, making it difficult to trace them.

"After the importation of illegal drugs, this is one of the most serious organised criminal activities," said Nicholas Somers of the Society for Valuers and Auctioneers.

All aboard with Dando

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

"*YOU* get all the good jobs, don't you?" grumbled a Percy Sugden sound-alike, boarding his flight to Orlando. Jill Dando, dressed as a stewardess, flashed her fine teeth.

It is easy to build up quite a dangerous head of steam watching holiday programme presenters swan around the world at our expense. **Fasten Your Seatbelt** (BBC1) is a useful escape valve.

Jill Dando worked as an air stewardess and Kevin Woodford as an entertainer on a cruise liner. Under pressure, you noticed with interest, she whinges and he bristles.

Kevin's lowest point was his arrival. "What do I call you?" he asked the entertainments officer. "Sir's fine." "*Sir?*" "Sir!" On his final assessment Attitude To Authority was left empty. His finest hour was a rendition of Great Balls Of Fire. I would describe it as pretty dashed brave.

Jill was not gruntled to discover that nobody looked at her. "They've got their headphones on, they're looking up at the screen. You think, 'I'm a human being here. Hello!'" In this she was mistaken. They were watching.

She couldn't get the trays out of the trolley ("Why are they all coming out together? Oh, I can't get that out at *all!*") and, once they were out, she couldn't put them back ("I'm going to get someone to help me. I can't do it.") She was spectacularly null and void about the duty-free trolley. ("I'm starting to panic now. There's too much to think about . . . The computer . . . the credit card swipes. They're £9.99. No, they're not. They're £4.99. Alison! I'm pressing the wrong buttons here. I don't know what I'm doing.") So she retreated to the galley. Where she couldn't open a milk carton.

In **The Verdict** (BBC2) Mr Justice Hooper was off to work. "Tomorrow I start a murder."

A cool customer, constable.

David Rose, who has a firm grasp of priorities, asked the crucial question: "How do you keep your stockings up?" The judge said he used to wear women's tights but they tended to descend with the setting sun. "I hit upon the idea of what are called Thigh Highs."

His clerk, who looks like a superior butler, buys them from Debenhams and has other unexpected duties. "Sometimes I arrange a spare lady." For dinner, naturally.

Judges are believed to be remote. Like ducks on a pond, they seem to be in life, not of it. Like ducks, there is something inherently amusing about them. Judge Goldstein lists only one club, his bridge club. Yet he seriously considered giving up this passion when he became a judge. "In case some row might break out at the table, which would be unseemly." I had no idea bridge was so inflammatory. (He has also been a West Ham fan from a boy and doesn't seem to worry about unseemly scenes at Upton Park.)

Judge Tucker explained reassuringly how judges have their finger on the public pulse: "I happen to live very close to a council estate. My gardener lives there."

Eminent Victorians: the public and private lives of three literary spirits who shaped an age of worries and wonders

Sage or snob?

Stefan Collini

A Life of Matthew Arnold
by Nicholas Murray
Hodder & Stoughton 400pp £20

ROY HATTERSLEY (among others) has proposed a good dose of Matthew Arnold as a forthright remedy for some of our present discontents. Maybe he's right. But before reaching for our copies of Culture And Anarchy or reading "Dover Beach", it is worth reflecting on how Arnold's famous achievements as poet and cultural essayist were bound up with mechanisms of celebrity which are actually very different from those we are familiar with.

For Arnold (1822-88) was not to be squeezed in to the last few minutes of Newsnight or made the subject of a pertly familiar "profile": his natural medium was 10,000 words of uninterrupted print stretching across the illustration-free pages of the great quarterly and monthly reviews of the time. These essays can now seem somewhat leisurely performances, but their amplitude gave his distinctive tone and perspective time to do their work. They were often the product of the many successful lectures — on such not obviously compelling subjects as "the Persian Passion Play" — which Arnold gave in Britain and America. That particular lecture drew an audience of 900 to the Masonic Hall in Birmingham in 1871, with 200 being turned away.

Notoriously, the danger is that the more a critic becomes a public figure, the more the quality of his literary journalism and cultural criticism tends to decline. The pulpits are too easily available, the congregation demands a sermon whether one is ready or not. This is one of the tensions at the heart of the role of the cultural critic or intellectual: such figures must already have some kind of reputation if they are to be invited to speak with authority on matters of general interest, but in the end there is something self-defeating in having one's opinions published just because one has become a person whose opinions are published.



Come into my parlour dear . . . from left, Lewis Carroll, George Eliot and Matthew Arnold

Some of Arnold's most widely cited later pieces surely reveal the corrosion of fame at work, and the balance tips too far towards headmasterly complacency. But in his best work in the 1860s, when the essays that became his most enduring books like Essays In Criticism and Culture And Anarchy were written, Arnold brought off this delicate balancing act with great virtuosity. Yet it is also true that of all the eminent Victorians, Arnold seems to have an unrivalled capacity still to get up people's noses.

BUT THEN, is that such a bad quality in a cultural critic? Nicholas Murray's A Life Of Matthew Arnold is a readable and unpretentious biography structured around the rising curve of his fame. Murray sticks close to Arnold's letters, and this yields a narrative that is strong on domestic life, on Arnold's dealings with publishers, and on his never wholly successful efforts at self-improvement ("How life rushes away, and youth. One has dawdled and scrupled and fiddle faddled — and it is all over": he was 29 at the time). The chief limitation of this somewhat narrow focus is that there is too little on the intellectual and social context, and with such a constantly polemical author as Arnold this makes it hard to recapture the point of his various sorties into cultural debate.

Murray's portrait gives a fetching account of Arnold as an undergraduate at Oxford in the early 1840s, more bent on pleasure than on exam-passing. As his brother recalled much later: "He read a little with the reading men, hunted a little with the fast men, and dressed a little with the dressy men." Falling in love in his mid-20s stirred Arnold to write what is probably his best sequence of poems. The identity of the real-life original of the "Marguerite" of these poems has teased biographers ever since.

The central poignancy of Arnold's life was the drying-up of his poetic gifts. By his mid-30s his poetic achievement was almost all behind him, and an awareness of this fact, making him at once wry and resolved, keeps breaking through in his letters. But by then he was immersed in the business of earning enough to keep his growing family.

He still remains something of an enigma. The truth surely is that the name "Matthew Arnold" has become a totem and a taboo. For some it indicates everything worth defending in the inherited cultural tradition against the depredations of fashionable relativism and commercial tat, while for others it signifies precisely the elitism and outworn snobbery that still blight cultural discussion. Getting beyond the label and reading the man himself is to discover a figure who is more various and more radical than either of these stereotypes allows.

The original Humbert

Natasha Walter

Lewis Carroll
by Michael Bakewell
Heinemann 381pp £20

Lewis Carroll: A Portrait with Background
by Donald Thomas
John Murray 405pp £25

"*THE* Rev CL Dodgson had no life," wrote Virginia Woolf. But that hasn't put anyone off. Michael Bakewell's new biography, as he is clearly aware, has rather missed the boat: "This book was scheduled for publication in July 1995," he tells us plaintively, "but was held up over matters of copyright." Donald Thomas, in response to an embarrassing glut in the biography market, has tried to occupy a different niche, by calling his offering a "Portrait with background". That is, a biography without a clear narrative, and a few splurges of incidental detail; the number of prostitutes in Piccadilly, the mores of bathers at Eastbourne, theological debates in Oxford, and so on.

I am grateful to Thomas, however, for repeating one quotation. Not by Dodgson himself, but by Vladimir Nabokov, who translated Alice's Adventures In Wonderland into Russian in 1923. "I always call him Lewis Carroll Carroll because he was the first Humbert Humbert," Nabokov told Vogue in 1966, referring to his "wretched perversions and to those ambiguous photographs he took in dim rooms".

Dodgson's melancholy has the same tenor as Humbert's: an excess of despair, expressed with finicky precision. "The pursuer of happiness," he once mused, "when he has exhausted all other devices, betakes himself, as a last and desperate resource, to some such wretched watering-place as Eastbourne, and hopes to find, in the tedious and depressing society of the daughters of mistresses of boarding-schools, the happiness he has failed to find elsewhere." Dodgson and Humbert tread the same line between coarseness and delicacy, with countless little parentheses and quotation marks and circumlocutions that attempt to veil the march of desire. For instance, when Dodgson is desperately trying to find new girls to photograph naked, he is thrilled that the mother of one of the little girls he has photographed has put her "full-front" photograph out in her drawing room — "I quite hope that picture on your drawing-room table will serve as a sort of 'decoy-duck' and reveal to you (and through you to me) other parents who possess well-made children who have a taste for being taken without the encumbrance of dress," he wrote. Humbert's prudishness about Lolita's behaviour (no dates, no dances) chimes in with the attitudes of this other, less self-conscious paedophile. Dodgson strongly berated his child friends for any precocious behaviour. His furtive love of "little nudities" is both sensual and sacral, an odd combination that Nabokov captured perfectly.

But overall Thomas's biography isn't nearly as satisfying as Bakewell's straightforward, chewy narrative. Bakewell reminds us why these studies and biographies go on clunking off the presses. There is a void — a mystery — at the heart of Dodgson's life, and it beckons us in. How did the amoral, groundbreaking, sophisticated works that are the Alice books trip from the mind of this prudish, naive don? There is no answer. But clearly, Dodgson himself had very little purchase on the nature of the works he created. When he wrote his "Nursery Alice", an attempt to recreate the first flash of brilliance for a younger audience, it was as if somebody else had got hold of his pen (a sensation the White King understood so well). Perhaps Carroll's brilliance arose precisely from this inability to inquire too far into his own mind. If he had been able to reason out, as his critics attempt to, the emotional and intellectual themes that underlay Alice, he may never have dared to carry them through. As a middle-aged man he lay awake, night after night, creating mathematical problems rather than confronting the true colours of his emotions. He turned his back on his secret garden, and though we may stand, like Alice, peering through the door, his biographers will never find a golden key to let us in.

Spasms of piety behind the zeitgeist

James Wood

George Eliot: A Life
by Rosemary Ashton
Hamish Hamilton 465pp £25

GEORGE ELIOT is a systematic humanist, and thus an oddity in English fiction. Her sense of life's essential raggedness — the moral bumble which her fiction condemns and forgives — was reached through clean rigour. Her imagination was, as it were, cork-lined and soundproofed: she had the most thoroughly intellectual mind of any English novelist. But she also lived one of the boldest lives of any 19th century writer.

Rosemary Ashton's fine biography efficiently streamlines this life, but does not stint on either Eliot's intellectual development or the daily struggles of her unconventional existence. She powerfully blocks in Eliot's difficult adolescence (her mother died when she was 17), a plain, fiercely ratiocinative girl who used her prim ascetic evangelical faith as, in part, a protection against a worldliness which would not have her. At 18, and running her father's household, she was self-deprecating about her looks and given to spasms of piety (in her fiction these would become spasms of wisdom).

But four years later, she told her father that she would no longer accompany him to church. Her life of free-thinking rebellion had begun. She had been reading new biblical criticism, and a month later she wrote to her father, a cool 22-year-old: "I regard these writings [the Bible] as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction . . . and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life . . . to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness."

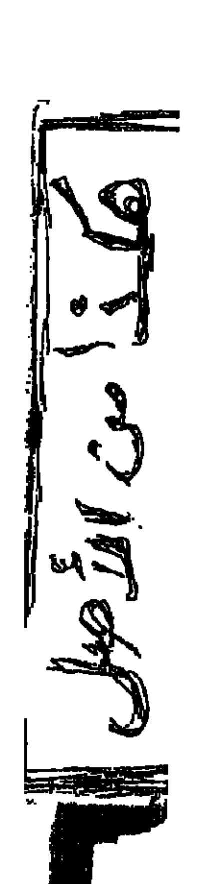
In London, she became the de facto editor of the Westminster Review, and began to write powerful essays. Her intellectual circle was almost entirely masculine. One of those men was George Henry Lewes, with whom Eliot probably began an affair — so Ashton conjectures — in 1853. Lewes was one of those Victorian engines running on the invisible fuel of the zeitgeist. He wrote about science, about philosophy, about developments in German thought, about Spanish drama. He read a fistful of languages, was a rawer free-thinker than Eliot. He was unhappily married; his wife had several children by another man.

In 1854, Eliot and Lewes travelled together to Germany, in order to do research for Lewes's biography of Goethe, thereby making public their relationship. On their return, they began living together as husband and wife (Lewes could not get a divorce). Society, even unconventional literary society, was unprepared for this. George Eliot was effectively barred from polite communication.

Ashton, who has also written a very good biography of Lewes, brings alive this noble relationship. Isolated from much of society, the two spent a lot of time together, reading aloud, writing, walling, visiting galleries, travelling on the Continent: "Then came the delightful long evenings in which we read Shakespeare, Goethe, Heine and Macaulay, with German Pfferkuchen and Semmels (gingerbread and rolls) at the end", wrote Eliot of their evenings in Berlin during the Goethe research. Of their life in London, she wrote that she went to bed "regretting each day as it goes".

Ashton's account of the birth of the great novels — Adam Bede, Middlemarch, Daniel Deronda — is wonderfully rooted in the particularities of this marriage of spirits and the happiness of these lovers. But her criticism of the fiction is somewhat superficial, and a little too indulgent. A shrewder critic might question the inconsistency of Eliot's anti-religious religion.

Still, Ashton's great service is to connect the early journalistic days of Eliot with the later, more stable world of her fiction. In the process, Ashton irradiates the fiction with a new luminosity of context. And she animates George Eliot as no previous biographer has quite done; so freshly human is her narrative that it seems less a body of research than an organ of fiction. Ashton's book reads like an exciting and barely credible Victorian novel.



They're thrilling and topical — Michael Crichton's books have a knack of being touched by real events, writes **Mark Lawson**

Popular fiction's man of the moment

LONG-HAUL air travel has been very good to thriller writers. Even people who are cerebral readers when on terra firma prefer, while in the air, a fast-paced narrative. They want something which will easily distract them from the tedium or fear of their elevated incarceration. So airport bookstores have become a lucrative market for the yarn-spinners and one of the main heroes of the pressurised readers has been Michael Crichton.

The American writer's bestselling novels of the nineties — Jurassic Park (1991), Rising Sun (1992), Disclosure (1993) — have been the perfect flyer's diversion: movie-ready tales told in short, tense scenes interspersed with enough well-researched information — on genetic engineering, economic imperialism and sexual harassment law respectively — to reassure snootier readers that their brains are not entirely treading air. And, when they ran out of pages, they were likely to find that one of the movies rapidly produced from the books — Spielberg's Jurassic Park became the most successful film of all time — playing on the cabin entertainment system.

So passengers in transit this month will have been thrilled to find a new hardcover Crichton title on display at Heathrow, Kennedy and all other English language destinations. They will soon discover, though, that the former traveller's friend has, with this book, produced the worst of all texts with which to settle down on a 747. For Airframe is a thriller about a mid-air disaster which strikes a commercial jet. The movie is, inevitably, already in production but, however successful, seems destined to become the first Crichton spin-off to be rejected as an in-flight movie.

Michael Crichton . . . up there with the boxers and the corporate raiders in the American income lists PHOTOGRAPH: JONATHAN EXLEY

Crichton has come to be regarded as popular fiction's Mystic Mike. He has a knack for anticipating the saleable which, had it not made him impossibly rich as a novelist, might have earned him many millions as a stockbroker.

Jurassic Park — in which a scientist succeeds in replicating dinosaurs from DNA — was published just weeks before the first scientific articles claiming that cloning had become a genuine scientific possibility, and was therefore perfectly positioned to be an accessible focus for media debate on genetic engineering.

Rising Sun — in which a murder in a Tokyo corporation is the peg for an examination of the Japanese financial domination of America — perfectly coincided with a US election year in which insurgent candidates Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot had raised for the first time the question of the economic threat from the East.

And Disclosure — which centres on a sexual harassment suit in a Seattle computer corporation — had the luck or judgment to be published on the eve of the declaration of gender war in America, with the sexual harassment accusations brought by Anita Hill against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and the emasculation of John Wayne Bobbitt by his wife.

The aviation thriller is already an well-established genre and the melancholy history of passenger flight is such that any novel about an air disaster is nearly guaranteed a topical peg. Yet, even so, it is another tribute to Crichton's fictional premonition that Airframe, a project he started two years ago, should come to be published in what has been the year of the scary aeroplane. It reaches the bookstores within months of the TWA 800 disaster; the world's worst mid-air collision, over Delhi, and within weeks of the hijacked plane disaster in the Comoros. Once notoriously labelled a "zeitgeist-surfer", the author has caught the wave perfectly again.

Yet Crichton's position in the nineties as one of only two American novelists to have become a superpower in both publishing and movie-making — the other is the legal thriller writer John Grisham — is all the more surprising for the fact that, as he approached his 50th birthday five years ago, his artistic career would have been written off as an interesting failure.

Born in Chicago in 1942, Crichton seemed by adolescence someone designed if not for distinction then distinctiveness, standing 6ft 9in and displaying a genius-level IQ. Graduating from Harvard with a first-class degree in anthropology, he spent a year lecturing in that subject before enrolling at Harvard Medical School.

Having already been supported by his family through one degree, he paid his way through medicine by writing hack thrillers, at a rate of several thousand words each day, under the pseudonyms Jeffrey Hudson and John Lange. These designations were self-conscious puns about his build, the former being a famous American dwarf and the latter a variation on Long John. The fact that he hid behind them suggests he assumed he would one day produce something better, although there was an early indication of zeitgeist-surfing in A Case Of Need, a Jeffrey Hudson thriller set in an abortion clinic, and published in 1968, just before the debate over the ethics of legalised terminations erupted.

Qualifying as a doctor the following year, Crichton took a fellowship with Jonas Salk, creator of the polio vaccine. In 1969, Crichton published The Andromeda Strain, the first work with which he had been happy to see his own name on the cover.

The young editor assigned to the book, Robert Gottlieb, made an intervention which would be crucial to the creation of the Crichton literary franchise. The Andromeda Strain told of an attempt by five American biochemists to resist a lethal virus from space which has infected earth after the crash of a scientific probe. Gottlieb advised the 29-year-old Crichton to pare down character description and interior psychology and frame the book in the style of popular scientific journalism, with staccato factual prose, photocopied documents and diagrams, and a list of sources at the end.

Gottlieb, the scholarly editor, and Crichton, the spoiled doctor, had engineered the techno-thriller, a merger between the novel and non-fiction. The book also demonstrated the writer's skill at fictionalising prevailing anxieties, drawing on post-Apollo II fears about the risks of penetrating space, although it can also be read today as impressively pre-Aids and pre-Ebola in its depiction of viral mayhem. It signalled an early indication of Crichton's attractiveness to film-makers, earning him a life-changing fee of $250,000 for the rights to the 1971 film.

If you ever hear of a Crichton novel called Armageddon, gather your loved ones and head for the hills

Two more scientific nightmare novels followed: The Terminal Man (1972), in which medical electrodes turn a patient into a psychopath, and Westworld (1973), a futuristic thriller about a theme park in which tourists enact rather than observe their fantasies.

The film was enough of a success to put Crichton in demand behind the camera, but the next decade and a half looked like a classic California story of multiple marriages, psychoanalysis and squandered talent. There were so-so films — The First Great Train Robbery (1978) — and no-no books, including a novelisation of Beowulf which Crichton now omits from his bibliographies.

Himself looking like an artistic dinosaur as his sixth decade loomed, Crichton sat down in his Santa Monica office apartment to write a techno-thriller about reborn dinosaurs. In five years since the publication of Jurassic Park, he has sold around 30 million books, which, including film rights of around $3 million for each of his recent titles, have put him up there with the boxers and the corporate raiders in the American income lists.

How did this turnaround happen? With Jurassic Park, Rising Sun and Disclosure, Crichton had anticipated, or chanced upon, two key elements in nineties culture. The first was that — in a world increasingly saturated with fact in the form of visual and printed news — the task of popular fiction would be not escapist but explanatory.

The second was that — as a nervous Hollywood became ever less keen on original scripts and concepts, preferring stories which had been shown to work in another form — the gap between novel and film treatment should be closed as tightly as possible. The Crichton formula depended on three elements: prescience, technology, and camera-readiness.

Timely, informative and filmable, Airframe is a classic Crichton product, a return to form after the sloppy and opportunistic The Lost World, his sequel to Jurassic Park.

Set over the space of a single week — Crichton's preferred timescale, from The Andromeda Strain through to Rising Sun and Disclosure — the book begins with a catastrophic episode of turbulence aboard TransPacific Flight 545, an N22 twin-engined airliner flying from Hong Kong to Denver. Three passengers are dead and nearly 100 injured when the jet makes an emergency landing at Los Angeles airport. The narrative then switches to Norton Aircraft, manufacturer of the plane. A huge order for N22s is under negotiation with the Chinese and will be wrecked if the new-generation plane is shown to have malfunctioned. Casey Singleton, who works in the Incident Review team at Norton, must find the explanation for the accident in an atmosphere of corporate secrecy and paranoia.

Intriguingly, given that Crichton is a multi-millionaire whose previous books have been somewhat rightwing in their assumptions, Airframe is an open attack on the free-market deregulation of the airlines by President Reagan and the resultant reduction in maintenance and passenger safety. A sub-plot featuring journalistic vultures from an American television current affairs show covering the the accident also blames what Crichton sees as media irresponsibility on the removal of the fair reporting restrictions on television journalists, another initiative of the Reagan administration.

This is by far the author's most necessary book.

But commercial airliners do malfunction, on a roughly monthly basis, and so Crichton's latest thriller deals with urgent rather than merely diverting material. A lesser writer would have made their fictionally stricken plane the target of terrorism, but Crichton realises that the majority of air accidents result from mechanical mishandling or malfunction. The increasing suggestion that the TWA 800 disaster was caused by technical failure has, typically, come at exactly the right time for his book.

If you ever find in a publisher's catalogue the announcement of an impending Crichton novel called Armageddon, gather your loved ones and head for the hills.

Airframe is published by Century at £16.99. To order a copy at the special discount price of £12.99 contact Books@TheGuardianWeekly

Standing the test of time

Paul Evans

THE RUGGED, dark brown and russet walls wrap round with the smell of damp wood and rich mould. Chinks let in pale winter sunlight and the slow Sunday afternoon sounds of the village. Outside, low branches sway and their green-black needles whisper in the cold wind through the gravestones. On these boughs are plump scarlet berries which conceal a poisoned seed. Inside this huge, hollow trunk, a strangely peaceful darkness issues from the earth and it seems that the world grinds softly round this fixed dark point, this gateway to the underworld. Perhaps this is a forbidden place. This is the heart of a yew tree in Claverley churchyard in Shropshire.

The tree, whose fruits show that it is female, is over 2,500 years old. Long before the church was built, in fact long before Christianity, she grew as the spiritual focus on a burial mound atop a red sandstone hill, as she does now. Because of the yew's incredible age, to the Celts it was the tree of life. Indeed, there are yew trees in Britain that are estimated to be over 5,000 years old: Whether in woods, churchyards, parks or gardens, the dark, mysterious old trees have a power which draws us to them, a power which bears witness to the death and rebirth of countless years.

The yew tree, *Taxus baccata*, is distributed throughout Europe, across North Africa, thorough what used to be called Asia Minor and along the Himalayas. The mysteries of many religions and cults surround these trees. In Northern Europe, at the midwinter festivals, a log of yew wood, the Yule log, was burned on ceremonial fires celebrating the death and rebirth of the year. From the burning Yule log came Yuletide, the winter solstice festival that became absorbed into Christmas.

According to a survey carried out in 1988, at least 500 churchyards in England and Wales have yew trees which are as old, and in some cases much older than the church itself. The distribution of these yews is concentrated in southeast and central England, Wales and the Lake District.



ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

The favoured habitats of yew trees is on chalk or limestone soils, like the 500 year old grove on the chalk at Kingley Vales in Sussex.

Trees where growth rings can be counted are easy to age, and a yew tree of 12ft in girth is reckoned to be 300 years old. But in ancient trees, age is notoriously difficult to calculate because they are hollow. Research on the age of yew trees has changed radically thanks to the work of Alan Meredith who estimates that yews with a girth of 30ft are 2,400 years old. Those with a 33ft girth are 3,000 years old. By this measure, the 35ft trees at Defynog, Discoed and Llanfaredd churchyards in Powys are 4,500 years old. These trees provide an archaeological, ecological and spiritual link with prehistory, and pagan and Christian traditions.

If you can find an old yew tree and want to record it, measure the girth of the tree about 4ft above ground level by wrapping a piece of string around it and measuring the length of the string. Note the location with the grid reference if possible, naming the churchyard or place name and give any details of nearby archaeological sites like burial mounds etc, or any legends and stories that are attached to the tree or its place.

In September last year, David Bellamy launched the "Yews for the Millennium" campaign which aims to take cuttings from 2,000-year-old trees and plant one in every parish in Britain.

For further information contact the Conservation Foundation, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR (telephone +44-171 823 8791)

Chess Leonard Barden

WHEN Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, the controversial president of the world chess body, Fide, made the huge gaffe of announcing that the Karpov-Kamsky title match would be played in Baghdad, with Saddam Hussein making the first move, few observers gave the 35-year-old Russian any chance of keeping his job at this autumn's election. Yet, in the event, he defeated his Brazilian challenger by a near 2-1 margin.

Ilyumzhinov really made a brilliant recovery. First, he hosted the Karpov v Kamsky series in his home town of Elista, where the organisation went well and the games were hard fought. Then he gave the veteran ex-champion Smyslov a pension, promised to stage the 1998 Olympiad in Kalmykia, and put his unpopular idea for an annual world championship with knock-out mini-matches on the back burner.

Just before the presidential vote, he produced two master strokes: a Karpov versus Kasparov world title reunification match for 1997 and a personal endorsement of his campaign from no less than Bobby Fischer, who wrote to wavering delegates that Ilyumzhinov was "a man of his word". Now safe for another term, Ilyumzhinov remains a hands-on Fide president and is learning from his mistakes. Last month, Elista again hosted the Russian championship, despite the fiasco of the 1994 tournament when the prize fund dropped by 12 per cent during play due to the collapse of the rouble. This time, prizes were in dollars, with $12,000 for the winner plus a car, which Alex Khalifman drove back to St Petersburg.

Khalifman's best game was a sophisticated version of a novice theme. Beginners like to accept the Queen's Gambit pawn 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 and try to hold it by b5, a plan which fails, as Black's does here, because White's fast piece development can exploit weaknesses on the Q-side and around the BK.

Khalifman v Sveshnikov

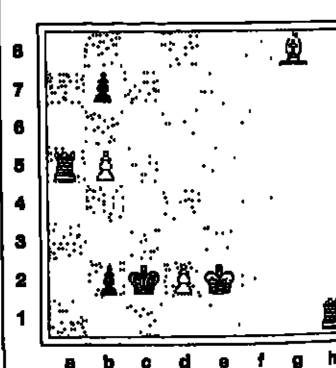
1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c6?! Move order tricks are part of every master's armoury nowadays. Black is angling for the known system Nc3 Nf6 5 e3 Nbd7, but playing c6 before Nf6 is too inflexible.

4 g3!? White switches to a promising form of the Catalan. **Nf6 5 Bg2 dxc4?!** Be7, 0-0 and Nbd7 is solid if passive. Instead Black launches an ego-trip to justify 3…c6.

6 0-0 b5 7 a4 Bb7 8 Ne5 Qb6?! Qc8 is normal. **9 b3! cxb3 10 Qxb3 Nbd7 11 Be3** The threat d4-d5 opens up the centre and BK. **c5 12 Nxd7 Nxd7 13 d5! bxa4 14 Qxa4 exd5 15 Nc3 d4 16 Nd5 Bxd5 17 Bxd5 Rd8 18 Bf4 Qf6** Black can no longer resist. If Be7 19 Rfb1 Qf6 20 Bc6 stops castling, while Bd6 19 Rfb1 Qc7 20 Rb7 wins material.

19 Qb5 Bd6 20 Ra6 Rb8 21 Bb7 Bxf4 22 Rxf6 gxf6 23 gxf4 f5 24 Qc6 Kd8 25 Qd5 Kc7 26 Bc6 Resigns

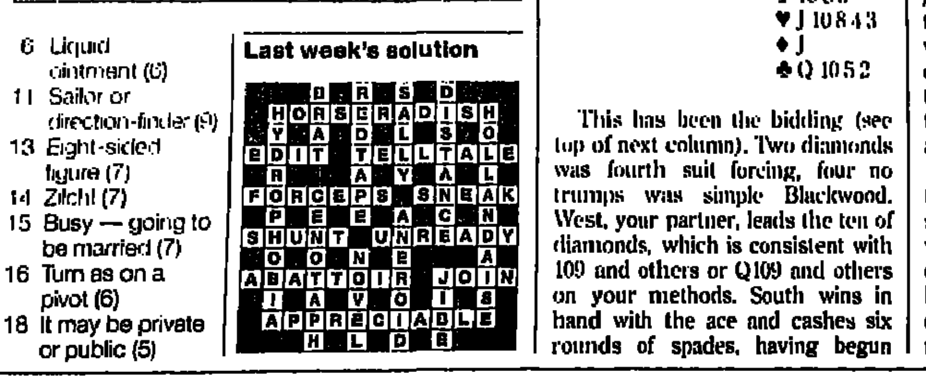
No 2452



White mates in three moves, against any defence (by H Jansen).

No 2451: 1 Bd1 Kf5 2 Be2 Kf6 3 Ba6 Kf5 4 Bc8+ Kf6 5 Kd7 Kf5 6 Ke7 mate.

Quick crossword no. 345



Across

1 Doctor (Slang) (6)
4 Pattern (5)
7 US state, maybe baked (6)
8 Top (6)
9 Caribbean island (4)
10 Spanish dance (8)
12 Device, skill, or stratagem (11)
17 Guard of consumer interests (8)
19 Roman garment (4)
20 Robust energy (6)
21 Slight pain (as of conscience) (6)
22 Thrust forward (5)
23 Cold and unresponsive (6)

Down

1 Shellfish (7)
2 Scorn (7)
3 Running on solid fuel (4-5)
4 Pattern — or mildew (5)
5 Fiendish (7)
6 Liquid ointment (6)
11 Sailor or direction-finder (9)
13 Eight-sided figure (7)
14 Zilch! (7)
15 Busy — going to be married (7)
16 Turn as on a pivot (6)
18 It may be private or public (5)

Last week's solution

Bridge Zia Mahmood

HEATHER DHONDY and Liz McGowan of the British ladies' team formed an alliance with the Icelandic Open team to enter the World Mixed Teams championship, and stormed through to the final, where they came up against an all-professional US team that contained two world champions.

Take the East cards on the deal below, and see if you can defeat South's grand slam:

North (dummy)
♠ 4
♥ A K 6 5 2
♦ K 3
♣ 9 7 6 4 3

East (you)
♠ 10 8 5
♥ J 10 8 4 3
♦ J
♣ Q 10 5 2

This has been the bidding (see top of next column). Two diamonds was fourth suit forcing, four no trumps was simple Blackwood. West, your partner, leads the ten of diamonds, which is consistent with 109 and others or Q109 and others on your methods. South wins in hand with the ace and cashes six rounds of spades, having begun

South	West	North	East
		1♥	No
1♠	No	2♣	No
2♦	No	3♣	No
4NT	No	5♦	No
7NT	No	No	No

with AKQJ32 in the suit. West follows to three rounds, then discards the queen, two and four of diamonds. Declarer throws four clubs and a heart from dummy. You can spare a heart and a club on the fourth and fifth spades, but what will you discard on the sixth?

It appears that West began with Q109842 in diamonds, and South with A765. If South has the queen of hearts, you need to keep that suit guarded and trust your partner for the king of clubs. But if South began with a void in hearts and AKx of clubs, you must throw a heart on the sixth spade in order to protect the club suit. The full deal is shown, above right.

In practice, the US East player threw a second club on the last spade. Liz McGowan's AK8 of clubs were now good, and she made her contract with six spade tricks, two hearts, two diamonds and three clubs. There were two clues which might have guided East to the right

North
♠ 4
♥ A K 6 5 2
♦ K 3
♣ 9 7 6 4 3

West
♠ 9 7 6
♥ Q 9 7
♦ Q 10 9 8 4 2
♣ J

East
♠ 10 8 5
♥ J 10 8 4 3
♦ J
♣ Q 10 5 2

South
♠ A K Q J 3 2
♥ None
♦ A 7 6 5
♣ A K 8

discard. South had jumped to 7NT on learning only that her partner had one ace; with a hand such as:

♠ A K Q J 3 2 ♥ Q ♦ A 7 6 5 ♣ A 8

she would hardly have been in a position to bid the grand slam without checking for kings in the North hand. And if West did not have a guard in hearts, he should have let you know the position by discarding hearts on the run of the spades. Since the contract was six spades at the other table, East's error cost her side 30 IMPs — and the Britain-Iceland combination won the World Championship by just 11.

Cricket One-day International: Zimbabwe v England

England dither to a new low

David Hopps in Bulawayo

ENGLAND have played Zimbabwe in four one-day internationals and have lost three, Sunday's two-wicket defeat here coming courtesy of about as vacillating a batting display as one could wish to witness — 152 all out on a pitch that might have inhibited strokeplay but which was reliable enough to have provided at least 200.

Zimbabwe can be quite a handy one-day side as England's captain Michael Atherton was careful to point out afterwards. So handy, in fact, that they had lost their last 10 one-day internationals, and had never beaten a Test nation when batting second in a limited-overs match.

England may have made a habit of losing in some strange places but they have rarely succumbed in such an easy-going atmosphere, where they had vocal support, where all the Zimbabweans in a crowd of 5,000 seemed to know each other. England did bowl with persistence and when Zimbabwe faltered at 107 for seven, they might have won.

But that was the cue for fortitude of a rather greater order. Alistair Campbell had demoted himself to No 7 after colliding with his teammate Guy Whittall during fielding practice. His right hand was heavily bruised and his cheek was scarred by Whittall's studs. But he batted judiciously and his unbeaten 32 ensured the match was won with more than six overs to spare — his first win as Zimbabwe's captain.

For the shot of the match, look no further than Eddo Brandes, the hefty chicken farmer who embarrasses England as easily as cracking eggs. When Croft's off-spin lured Streak into driving a return catch, Zimbabwe were 16 runs short with two wickets remaining and the tension had reached its height. Brandes whacked his first ball over long off for six. That as good as settled it.



Down and out . . . Darren Gough is run out by Zimbabwe's wicket keeper, Andy Flower PHOTOGRAPH: HOWARD BURDITT

Zimbabwe's top order had been held together by Waller, who made 48 until he was run out. Silverwood made a sound impression on his England debut, taking a wicket with his sixth ball when Grant Flower chopped on and then removing the elder Flower, Andy, to Knight's low catch at cover.

Atherton rationally opted to bowl out his three quicker bowlers. Gough's two wickets included the prize one of Houghton, who drove to extra cover, and Mullally's final spell brought two wickets in two balls. But Atherton eventually ran out of options. Croft's off-spin was withdrawn, after his first two overs cost 16, and Irani again looked vulnerable.

England's batting had looked comfortable enough to begin with but Streak's swing accounted for Knight and Stewart, at which point Atherton embarked upon prolonged and distrusting reconnaissance, labouring 77 balls over 23. Then he had a leg-side mow at Grant Flower's slow left-arm and was caught at mid-on.

Thorpe, coming in at No 4 even though Hussain and Crawley are in better form, had his off-bail flicked aside by Brandes. Crawley briefly looked in trim before he advanced to Rennie and drove a catch into the off-side. Only Hussain prospered, finishing unbeaten on 49, and even he could not have been entirely happy as, in the final throes, he ran out Gough and then lost both the strike and the last man Silverwood more easily than he might have wished.

Scores: England 152 Zimbabwe 153 for 8. Zimbabwe won by two wickets

Football Premiership: Liverpool 5 Middlesbrough 1

Fowler to the four

Jeremy Alexander

ROBBIE FOWLER, like a batsman on song, went past his century with a four. His second goal took him to the landmark in his 165th game for Liverpool, one fewer than Ian Rush. It is a momentous feat, completed within a performance of irresistible team momentum.

Towards the end at Anfield McAteer shot with orgiastic ambition and the ball skewed to the far touchline. The crowd laughed — and laughed again when it became a perfect pass for Bjornebye. Liverpool, three up, were on a spree against a defence that had been dispersed like motorway cones, leaving Walsh a helpless hero behind. Fowler played the flat-track bully.

This is the context in which his achievement on the day should be judged. It was too easy, so that a dozen chances escaped as well, ranging from the simple to the spectacularly optimistic. Even Fowler missed two of them, carried along by the tide of glee. But he is the poacher par excellence. When it mattered, his eye was keen, his balance superb, his execution infallible.

Beating the Rush . . . 102 goals in 165 games for Fowler

His first, after 29 seconds, was straightforward and set Liverpool at ease when they might have been on edge; two points from three home games had left the crowd restless to the point of hostility. His second was sharply reactive to a rebound, his third (straight after Boro's in-off) clinical, his fourth magical with twist and sleight of foot turning Whyte into a corkscrew. He has an instinct and confidence where others, especially McManaman, have a hang-up. Bjornebye scored the other and Collymore had a part in four. He, above all, revelled in the space that Boro could not get to.

Boro's defenders were in the wrong place all afternoon. The previous week Atherton had marked McManaman into anonymity and Sheffield Wednesday won 1-0, but Bryan Robson paid no heed. Denied the defensive experience of Pearson, Fleming, Vickers and Morris, as well as Juninho in attack, the Boro manager plumped for a free-wheeling approach when discipline was his only hope after 11 league games without victory. It put the ball into Liverpool's court and they returned it, as often as they cared, into Boro's net.

Robson could do with a fortnight's break instead of the festive glut of fixtures. He needs to restore Ravanelli's interest as much as to integrate Emerson, to bash heads and reinforce the club's ambition. On the opening day the Italian scored a hat-trick in the 3-3 draw with Liverpool. Now, without a goal in four games, he is burying his silver head in shrugging shoulders, sulking for £7 million. Fowler scored four for nothing.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Williams faces trial

FRANK WILLIAMS, chief of the Formula One team, is to go on trial with five others charged with manslaughter over the death of Brazilian driver, Ayrton Senna.

A lawyer for Mr Williams said a trial had been set for Feburary 20 in Italy and added that the first hearing would be before a judge at Imola, where Senna was killed in a crash during the San Marino Grand Prix on May 1, 1994.

DAMON HILL, winner of the Formula One world title in October, was named the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year on Sunday — the second time he has won the award. Hill collected it in 1994 when he missed the world title by one point. He said he was "enormously proud" to have been honoured in this way. "This really makes my year for me," Hill added.

Rower Steve Redgrave, who won Britain's only medal in the Atlanta Olympics and his fourth in the coxless pairs, was second, while jockey Frankie Dettori, winner of seven races in one day, finished third.

Meanwhile, Borussia Dortmund's Matthias Sammer is on course to win the 1996 European Footballer of the Year award. He was believed to have won two-thirds of the votes in the annual poll run by the magazine, France Football. Barcelona's Brazilian, Ronaldo, was in second position while Britain's Alan Shearer was third.

IAIN DOWIE, who has not scored for West Ham in the Premiership since March 23, struck twice within 10 minutes in the first half for Northern Ireland in their World Cup qualifier against Albania in Belfast. It was their first victory in Group Nine. In Group Seven, the match between Wales and Turkey finished as a goalless draw, virtually ending Welsh hopes of qualifying for the finals in France.

YORKSHIRE all-rounder Craig White took a career best 6-66 as England A wrapped up a successful Australian tour with a draw against Queensland at Brisbane. White passed 150 first-class wickets in the process as the home side were dismissed for 298. Opener Mark Butcher launched England A's second innings, making 47 from 36 balls. He was eventually out when he trod on his stumps, but White and Jason Gallian saw the side to 106-4 at the close. Scores: England A 230 and 106 for 4; Queensland 298.

During the tour, Butcher was the most successful batsman, scoring 264 runs in five innings at an average of 52.8, closely followed by White at 51. White headed the bowling table with 11 for 178 at an average of 16.18. England A won six games, drew three and lost one.

INDIA beat South Africa by 280 runs in the third and final Test at Kanpur to wrap up the series 2-1. It was South Africa's first series defeat since returning to international cricket in 1991. The visitors, set a victory target of 461, were bowled out after lunch on the final day for 180. Scores: India, 237 and 400 for 7 dec (Mohammad Azharuddin 163no); South Africa 177 and 180.

LIAM BOTHAM, son of former England cricket all-rounder Ian, has decided he will play a different ball game. The 19-year-old is not following in his father's footsteps, choosing to pursue a career in Rugby Union. Only months after a much-hailed first-class cricket debut for Hampshire in which he took five wickets, he has signed a contract to play rugby for West Hartlepool.

IT WAS more of the same when Riddick Bowe of America and Poland's Andew Golota squared up to each other in the boxing ring for the second time in five months, at Atlantic City on Saturday. Bowe, behind on all three judges' cards, benefited from Golota's penchant for throwing low blows and won on a disqualification. During the bout Bowe hit the canvas twice, while Golota was knocked down once.

JACKIE STEWART, the 57-year-old three-times world motor-racing champion, is back in the title hunt, this time with his own grand prix team. Last week his team car, the Stewart-Ford SF1, was unveiled in London. The Ford V10-powered car will be on the grid when the new F1 season begins in March.

Football results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP Leeds 0, Tottenham 0; Liverpool 5, Middlesbrough 1; Sunderland 3, Chelsea 0; Wimbledon 1, Blackburn 0; Derby 0, Everton 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Arsenal (played 17, points 35), 2, Liverpool (17-34); 3, Wimbledon (17-34).

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE First Division Barnsley 3, Tranmere 0; Birmingham P, W.B.A. P; Bolton 1, Ipswich 2; Bradford P, Reading P; Charlton 1, Port Vale 3; Norwich 1, Crystal Palace 1; Oxford 4, Sheffield Utd 1; Portsmouth 3, Huddersfield 1; QPR 4, Southend 0; Stoke 2, Swindon 0, Wolves 0, Oldham 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Bolton (23-42), 2, Barnsley (22-41); 3, Sheffield Utd (22-39).

Second Division Bournemouth 1, Millwall 1; Bristol City 1, Bristol Rovers 1; Burnley 1, Brentford 2; Gillingham 2, Bury 2; Luton 6, Crewe 0; Notts Co 0, Rotherham 0; Plymouth 2, Shrewsbury 2; Stockport 0, Peterborough 0, Walsall 1, Watford 1; Wycombe 1, Chesterfield 0; York 1, Wrexham 0. **Leading positions:** 1, Brentford (23-43), 2, Millwall (23-41); 3, Luton (22-40)

Third Division Brighton 3, Hull 0, Cambridge 1, Wigan 1, Chester 2, Darlington 1, Fulham 1, Leyton 1, Hereford 2, Carlisle 3, Lincoln 1, Northampton 1; Mansfield 1, Colchester 1; Rochdale 1, Hartlepool 3; Scunthorpe 4, Exeter 1; Torquay 1, Scarborough 0. **Leading positions:** 1, Fulham (23-49); 2, Carlisle (23-43); 3, Sheffield Utd (23-43).

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE Premier Division Aberdeen 0, Motherwell 0; Hibernian 1, Dundee Utd 1; Kilmarnock 2, Hearts 0; Raith P, Celtic P; Rangers 3, Dunfermline 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Rangers (16-38); 2, Aberdeen (17-29); 3, Celtic (14-27).

First Division Dundee 1, Stirling Albion 1; Falkirk 0, Morton 0; St Mirren 3, Partick 2. **Leading positions:** 1, St Johnston (17-38); 2, Falkirk (18-30); 3, Airdrie (17-29)

Second Division Brechin 3, Queen of South 3, Dumbarton 1, Hamilton 3; Livingston 1, Ayr 0, Stenhousemuir P, Clyde P; Stranraer 1, Berwick 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Livingston (17-37); 2, Ayr (17-35); 3, Hamilton (17-34).

Third Division Albion P, Ross Co P; E Stirling 1, Cowdenbeath 0, Forfar P, Alloa P, Queens Park 3, Arbroath 1; Inverness 2, Montrose 0 **Leading positions:** 1, Inverness (17-32); 2, Montrose (18-30); 3, Ross County (17-27).

TENNENTS SCOTTISH CUP First round replay Forfar 4, Albion 0; Clyde 3, Huntly 2.